







Class PZ 3

Book H3 14 C h

Copyright N<sup>o</sup> 8

**COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.**



















AUTHOR'S EDITION

---

WORKS OF  
ANTHONY HOPE

With Preface and Notes  
by the Author, and  
*Photogravure Illustration*

---

BALIOL

Limited to One Thousand  
Sets, of which this is

*Number*\_\_\_\_\_















A CHANGE OF  
AIR *and* A MAN  
OF MARK & &

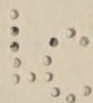
---

By ANTHONY HOPE

---

ILLUSTRATED

---



---

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
NEW YORK

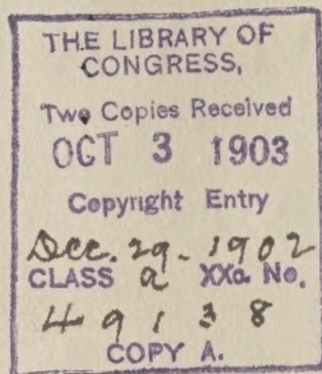
*Hawkins*

*Copy 2*



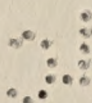
PZ3

.H314Ch  
8



COPYRIGHT, 1902, BY  
ANTHONY HOPE HAWKINS

*All rights reserved*



A Change of Air  
Copyright, 1894, by  
Henry Holt & Co.

A Man of Mark  
Copyright, 1895, by  
Henry Holt & Co.



# CONTENTS

## A CHANGE OF AIR

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A MISSION TO THE HEATHEN . . .	1
II. THE NEW MAN AT LITTLEHILL . . .	6
III. DENBOROUGH DETERMINES TO CALL . . .	14
IV. A QUIET SUNDAY AFTERNOON . . .	23
V. THE NECESSARY SCAPEGOAT . . .	32
VI. LITTLEHILL GOES INTO SOCIETY . . .	42
VII. "TO A PRETTY SAINT" . . .	52
VIII. AN INDISCREET DISCIPLE . . .	61
IX. DALE'S OWN OPINION . . .	70
X. A PREJUDICED VERDICT . . .	79
XI. A FABLE ABOUT BIRDS . . .	89
XII. A DEDICATION—AND A DESECRATION . . .	96
XIII. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GENIUS . . .	104
XIV. MR. DELANE LIKES THE IDEA . . .	112
XV. HOW IT SEEMED TO THE DOCTOR . . .	120
XVI. "NO MORE KINGS" . . .	128
XVII. DALE TRIES HIS HAND AT AN ODE . . .	139
XVIII. DELILAH JOHNSTONE . . .	146
XIX. A WELL-PAID POEM . . .	153
XX. AN EVENING'S END . . .	160



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXI. "THE OTHER GIRL DID" . . .	166
XXII. THE FITNESS OF THINGS . . .	173
XXIII. A MORBID SCRUPLE . . .	181
XXIV. THE HEROINE OF THE INCIDENT . .	188
XXV. THE SCENE OF THE OUTRAGE . . .	198
XXVI. AGAINST HER BETTER JUDGMENT . .	207
XXVII. A VILLAIN UNMASKED . . .	214
XXVIII. A VISION . . .	221



# CONTENTS

## A MAN OF MARK

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE MOVEMENT AND THE MAN . . .	1
II. A FINANCIAL EXPEDIENT . . .	6
III. AN EXCESS OF AUTHORITY . . .	16
IV. OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION . . .	22
V. I APPRECIATE THE SITUATION . . .	35
VI. MOURONS POUR LA PATRIE ! . . .	46
VII. THE MINE IS LAID . . .	57
VIII. JOHNNY CARR IS WILFUL . . .	65
IX. A SUPPER PARTY . . .	75
X. TWO SURPRISES . . .	79
XI. DIVIDING THE SPOILS . . .	93
XII. BETWEEN TWO FIRES . . .	105
XIII. I WORK UPON HUMAN NATURE . . .	118
XIV. FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND . . .	128
XV. A DIPLOMATIC ARRANGEMENT . . .	141







A CHANGE OF AIR







# A CHANGE OF AIR

## CHAPTER I

### A MISSION TO THE HEATHEN

WHEN the Great King, that mirror of a majesty whereof modern times have robbed the world, recoiled aghast from the threatened indignity of having to wait, he laid his finger with a true touch on a characteristic incident of the lot of common men, from which it was seemly that the state of God's Vicegerents should be free. It was a small matter, no doubt, a thing of manners merely and etiquette; yet manners and etiquette are first the shadowed expression of facts and then the survival of them, the reverence once paid to power, and now accorded, in a strange mixture of chivalry and calculation, to mere place whence power has fled. The day of vicegerents is gone, and the day of officers has come; and it is not unknown that officers should have to wait, or even, such is the insolence, no longer of office but of those who give it, should altogether go without. Yet, although everybody has now to wait, everybody has not to wait the same length of time. For example, a genius needs not wait so long for what he wants as a fool—unless, as chances now and then, he be both a genius and a fool, when probably his waiting will be utterly without end.

In a small flat in Chelsea, very high towards



## A CHANGE OF AIR

heaven, there sat one evening in the summer, two young men and a genius ; and the younger of the young men, whose name was Arthur Angell, said discontentedly to the genius,

“The brute only sent me ten and sixpence. What did you get for yours?”

The genius blushed and murmured apologetically,

“That agent chap I’ve sold myself to got twenty pounds for it.”

The second young man, who was not so young, being, in fact, well turned of thirty, and growing bald, took his pipe out of his mouth, and, pointing the stem first at the genius, then at Arthur Angell, and lastly, like a knife, at his own breast, said,

“Pounds—shillings—and pence. He sent me nothing at all.”

A pause followed, and the genius began :

“Look here, you fellows—” But Philip Hume went on : “Ten and sixpence is a good sum of money, a comfortable sum of money, and, my dear Arthur, I should say the full value of your poem. As to Dale’s poem, who knows the value of Dale’s poem? By what rod shall you measure—” He broke off with a laugh at Dale’s gesture of protest.

“I’m making the deuce of a lot of money,” said Dale in an awestruck tone. “It’s rolling in. I don’t know what to do with it.”

“Littlehill will swallow it,” said Philip.

“You don’t mean that he sticks to that idea?” exclaimed Arthur. “You don’t, do you, Dale?”

“I do,” answered Dale. “I’m not going permanently. I’m not going to forsake our old ways or our old life. I’m not going to turn into a rich man.”



## A MISSION TO THE HEATHEN

“I hope not, by Jove!” cried Arthur.

“But I want to see the country—I’ve not seen it for years. And I want to see country people, and—and——”

“It’ll end in our losing you,” prophesied Arthur gloomily.

“Nonsense!” said Dale, flushing a little. “It’ll end in nothing of the sort. I’ve only taken the house for a year.”

“A gentleman’s residence,” said Philip: “five sitting-rooms, twelve bedrooms, offices, stabling, and three acres of grounds.”

Arthur groaned.

“It sounds a villa all over,” he said.

“Not at all,” said Dale sharply; “it’s a country house.”

“Is there any difference?” asked Arthur scornfully.

“All the difference,” said Philip, “as you would know if you moved in anything approaching respectable circles.”

“I’m glad I don’t,” said Arthur. “What will respectable circles say to *The Clarion*, eh, Dale?”

“Who cares what they say?” laughed Dale. “They seem to buy it.”

Arthur looked at him with revengeful eye, and suddenly inquired,

“What about Nellie?”

“That’s just the delightful part of it,” answered Dale eagerly. “Nellie’s been seedy ever so long, you know. She was ordered perfect rest and country air. But it didn’t run to it.”

“It never ran to anything here,” said Philip in a tone of dispassionate acquiescence in facts, “till you became famous.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“Now I can help!” pursued Dale. “She and Mrs. Hodge are coming to pay me a long visit. Of course, Phil’s going to be there permanently. You’ll come too, Arthur?”

At first Arthur Angell said he would not go near a villa, he could not breathe in a villa, or sleep quiet o’ nights in a villa; but presently he relented.

“I can’t stand it for long, though,” he said. “Still, I’m glad you’re going to have Nellie there. She’d have missed you awfully. When do you go?”

“Actually, to-morrow. I’m not used to it yet.”

Arthur shook his head again, as he put on his hat.

“Well, good-night,” said he. “I hope it’s all right.”

Dale waited till the door was closed behind his guest, and then laughed good-humouredly.

“I like old Arthur,” he said. “He’s so keen and in earnest about it. But it’s all bosh. What difference can it make whether I live in London or the country? And it’s only for a little while.”

“He begins to include you in the well-to-do classes, and suspects you accordingly,” replied Philip.

There was a knock at the door, and a pretty girl came in.

“Oh, I ran up,” she said, “to ask whether this hat would do for Denshire. I don’t want to disgrace you, Dale;” and she held up a hat she carried in her hand.

“It would do for Paradise,” said Dale. “Besides, there isn’t going to be any difference at all in Denshire. We are going to be and do and dress just as we are and do and dress here. Aren’t we, Phil?”



## A MISSION TO THE HEATHEN

"That is the scheme," said Philip.

"We shall care for no one's opinion," pursued Dale, warming to his subject. "We shall be absolutely independent. We shall show them that their way of living is not the only way of living. We——"

"In fact, Nellie," interrupted Philip, "we shall open their eyes considerably. So we flatter ourselves."

"It's not that at all," protested Dale.

"You can't help it, Dale," said Nellie, smiling brightly at him. "Of course they will open their eyes at the great Mr. Bannister. We all open our eyes at him, don't we, Mr. Hume? Well, then, the hat will do?—as a week-day hat, I mean."

"A week-day hat?" repeated Philip. "Dear old phrase! It recalls one's happy church-going youth. Have you also provided a Sunday hat?"

"Of course, Mr. Hume."

"And, Dale, have you a Sunday coat?"

Dale laughed.

"It's a pretty excuse for pretty things, Phil," he said. "Let Nellie have her Sunday hat. I doubt if they'll let me into the church."

Philip stretched out his hand and took up a glass of whisky and water which stood near him.

"I drink to the success of the expedition," said he.

"To the success of our mission!" cried Dale gaily, raising his glass. "We will spread the light!"

"Here's to Dale Bannister, apostle *in partibus*!" and Philip drank the toast.



## CHAPTER II

### THE NEW MAN AT LITTLEHILL

MARKET DENBOROUGH is not a large town. Perhaps it is none the worse for that, and, if it be, there is compensation to be found in its picturesqueness, its antiquity, and its dignity ; for there has been a town where it stands from time immemorial, it makes a great figure in county histories and local guide-books, it is an ancient corporation, an assize town and quarter-sessions borough. It does not grow, for country towns, dependent solely on the support of the rural districts surrounding, are not given to growing much now-a-days. Moreover, the Delanes do not readily allow new houses to be built, and if a man lives in Market Denborough, he must be a roofless vagrant or a tenant of Mr. Delane. It is not the place to make a fortune ; but, on the other hand, unusual recklessness is necessary to the losing of one there. If the triumphs of life are on a small scale, the struggle for existence is not very fierce, and a wise man might do worse than barter the uncertain chances and precarious joys of a larger stage, to play a modest, easy, quiet part on the little boards of Market Denborough.

It must not, however, be supposed that the lion and the lamb have quite sunk their differences, and lain down together at Market Denborough. There, as elsewhere, the millennium tarries, and there are not wanting fierce feuds, personal, municipal, nay,



## THE NEW MAN AT LITTLEHILL

even, within the wide limits of Mr. Delane's tolerance, political. If it were not so, the Mayor would not have been happy, for the Mayor loved a fight; and Alderman Johnstone, who was a Radical, would have felt his days wasted; and the two gentlemen would not have been, as they continually were, at loggerheads concerning paving-contracts and kindred subjects. There was no want of interests in life, if a man were ready to take his own part and keep a sharp eye on the doings of his neighbour. Besides, the really great events of existence happened at Market Denborough much as they do in London: people were born, and married, and died; and while that rotation is unchecked, who can be seriously at a loss for matter of thought or topic of conversation?

As Mr. James Roberts, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, a thin young man, with restless eyes and tight-shut lips, walked down High Street one hot, sunny afternoon, it never entered his head that there was not enough to think about in Market Denborough. Wife and child, rent, rates, and taxes, patients and prescriptions, the relation between those old enemies, incomings and outgoings,—here was food enough for any man's meditations. Enough? Ay, enough and to spare of such distasteful, insipid, narrow, soul-destroying stuff. Mr., or, to give him the brevet rank all the town gave him, Dr. Roberts hated these sordid, imperious interests that gathered round him and hemmed him in, shutting out all else—all dreams of ambition, all dear long-harboured schemes, all burning enthusiasms, even all chance of seeking deeper knowledge and more commanding skill. Sadly and impatiently the Doctor shook his head,



## A CHANGE OF AIR

trying to put his visions on one side, and nail his mind down to its work. His first task was to turn £300 a year into £600. It was hard it should be so, and he chafed against necessity, forgetting, as perhaps he pardonably might, that the need was the price he paid for wife and child. Yes, it was hard ; but so it was. If only more people would be—no, but if only more people who were ill would call in Dr. Roberts ! Then he could keep two horses, and not have to “pad the hoof,” as he phrased it to himself, about sweltering streets or dusty lanes all the long afternoon, because his one pony was tired out with carrying him in the morning to Dirkham, a village five miles off, where he was medical officer at a salary of forty pounds by the year. That was forty, and Ethel had a hundred, and the profits from his paying patients (even if you allowed for the medicine consumed by those who did not pay) were about a hundred and fifty. But then the bills—Oh, well, he must go on. The second horse must wait, and that other dream of his, having an assistant, that must wait too. If he had an assistant, he would have some leisure for research, for reading, for studying the political and social questions where his real and engrossing interest lay. He could then take his part in the mighty work of rousing—

Here his meditations were interrupted. He had reached, in his progress down the street, a large plate-glass-windowed shop, the shop of a chemist, and of no less a man than Mr. James Hedger, Mayor of Market Denborough. The member of the lower branch of their common art was a richer man than he who belonged to the higher, and when Mr. Hedger was playfully charged



## THE NEW MAN AT LITTLEHILL

with giving the young Doctor his medicines cheap, he never denied the accusation. Anyhow, the two were good friends, and the Mayor, who was surveying his dominions from his doorstep, broke in on Dr. Roberts' train of thought with a cheerful greeting.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked.

"No; I've no time for the news. I always look to you for it, Mr. Mayor."

"It mostly comes round to me, being a centre, like," said the Mayor. "It's natural."

"Well, what is it this time?" asked the Doctor, calling up a show of interest. He did not care much for Denborough news.

"Littlehill's let," replied the Mayor.

Littlehill, the subject of Philip Hume's half-ironical description, was a good house, standing on rising ground about half a mile outside the town. It belonged, of course, to Mr. Delane, and had stood empty for more than a year. A tenant at Littlehill meant an increase of custom for the tradespeople, and perchance for the doctors. Hence the importance of the Mayor's piece of news.

"Indeed?" said Roberts. "Who's taken it?"

"Not much good—a young man, a bachelor," said the Mayor, shaking his head. Bachelors do not require, or anyhow do not take, many chemists' drugs. "Still, I hear he's well-off, and p'r'aps he'll have people to stop with him."

"What's his name?"

"Some name like Bannister. He's from London."

"What's he coming here for?" asked Roberts who, if he had been a well-to-do bachelor, would not have settled at Market Denborough.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“Why shouldn’t he?” retorted the Mayor, who had never lived, or thought of living, anywhere else.

“Well, I shouldn’t have thought he’d have found much to do. He wouldn’t come in the summer for the hunting.”

“Hunting? Not he! He’s a literary gentleman—writes poetry and what not.”

“Poetry? Why, it’s not Dale Bannister, is it?”

“Ay, that’s the name.”

“Dale Bannister coming to Littlehill! That is an honour for the town!”

“An honour? What do you mean, sir?”

“Why, he’s a famous man, Mr. Mayor. All London’s talking of him.”

“I never heard his name in my life before,” said the Mayor.

“Oh, he’s a genius. His poems are all the rage. You’ll have to read them now.”

“He’s having a lot done up there,” remarked the Mayor. “Johnstone’s got the job. Mr. Bannister don’t know as much about Johnstone as some of us.”

“How should he?” said Roberts, smiling.

“Johnstone’s buildin’ ’im a room. It’ll tumble down.”

“Oh, come, Mr. Mayor, you’re prejudiced.”

“No man can say that of me, sir. But I knows—I know Johnstone, Doctor. That’s where it is!”

“Well, I hope Johnstone’s room won’t fall on him. We can’t spare Dale Bannister. Good-day, Mr. Mayor.”

“Where are you goin’?”

“To Tom Steadman’s.”

“Is he bad again?” inquired the Mayor, with interest.



## THE NEW MAN AT LITTLEHILL

“Yes. He broke out last week, with the usual result.”

“Broke out? Yes! He had two gallons of beer and a bottle o’ gin off the ‘Blue Lion’ in one day, the landlord told me.”

“They ought to go to prison for serving him.”

“Well, well, a man drinks or he don’t,” said the Mayor tolerantly; “and if he does, he’ll get it some’ow. Good-day, sir.”

The Doctor completed his rounds, including the soothing of Tom Steadman’s distempered imagination, and made his way home in quite a flutter of excitement. Hidden away in his study, underneath heavy medical works and voluminous medical journals, where the eye of patients could not reach, nor the devastations of them that tidy disturb, lay the two or three little volumes which held Dale Bannister’s poems. The Doctor would not have admitted that the poems were purposely concealed, but he certainly did not display them ostentatiously, and he undoubtedly told his wife, with much decision, that he was sure they would not prove to her taste. Yet he himself almost worshipped them; all the untamed revolt, the recklessness of thought, the scorn of respectability, the scant regard to what the world called propriety, which he had nourished in his own heart in his youth, finding no expression for them, and from which the binding chains of fate seemed now for ever to restrain his spirit, were in those three slim volumes. First came *The Clarion and other Poems*, a very small book, published by a very small firm,—published for the author, though the Doctor did not know this, and circulated at the expense of the same; then *Sluggards*, from a larger firm, the



## A CHANGE OF AIR

source of some few guineas to Dale Bannister, of hundreds more if he had not sold his copyright; and lastly, *The Hypocrite's Heaven*, quite a lengthy production, blazoning the name of the leading house of all the trade, and bearing in its train a wealth of gold, and praise, and fame for the author: yes, and of rebuke, remonstrance, blame, and hands uplifted in horror at so much vice united to so much genius. Praise and rebuke alike brought new bricks to build the pyramid of glory; and on the top of it, an object of abhorrence and of worship, stood the young poet, prodigally scattering songs, which, as one critic of position said of them, should never have been written, but, being written, could never die. Certainly the coming of such a man to settle there was an event for Market Denborough; it was a glorious chance for the poet's silent, secret disciple. He would see the man; he might speak with him; if fortune willed, his name might yet be known, for no merit of his, but as that of Dale Bannister's friend.

Women have very often, and the best of women most often, a provoking sedateness of mind. Mrs. Roberts had never read the poems. True, but she had of course read about them, and about their author, and about their certain immortality; yet she was distinctly more interested in the tidings of Tom Steadman, a wretched dipsomaniac, than in the unparalleled news about Dale Bannister. In her heart she thought the Doctor a cleverer, as she had no doubt he was a better, man than the poet, and the nearest approach she made to grasping the real significance of the situation was when she remarked,

“It will be nice for him to find one man, at all events, who can appreciate him.”



## THE NEW MAN AT LITTLEHILL

The Doctor smiled; he was pleased—who would not be?—that his wife should think first of the pleasure Dale Bannister would find in his society. It was absurd, but it was charming of her, and as she sat on the edge of his chair, he put his arm round her waist and said,

“I beat him in one thing, anyhow.”

“What’s that, Jim?”

“My wife. He has no wife like mine.”

“Has he a wife at all?” asked Mrs. Roberts, with increased interest. A wife was another matter.

“I believe not, but if he had——”

“Don’t be silly. Did you leave Tom quiet?”

“Hang Tom! he deserves it. And give me my tea.”

Then came the baby, and with it an end, for the time, of Dale Bannister.



## CHAPTER III

### DENBOROUGH DETERMINES TO CALL

“I WILL awake the world,” Dale Bannister had once declared in the insolence of youth and talent and the privacy of a gathering of friends. The boast was perhaps as little absurd in his mouth as it could ever be; yet it was very absurd, for the world sleeps hard, and habit has taught it to slumber peacefully through the batterings of impatient genius at its door. At the most, it turns uneasily on its side, and, with a curse at the meddlesome fellow, snores again. So Dale Bannister did not awake the world. But, within a month of his coming to Littlehill, he performed an exploit which was, though on a smaller scale, hardly less remarkable. He electrified Market Denborough, and the shock penetrated far out into the surrounding districts of Denshire,—even Denshire, which, remote from villas and season-tickets, had almost preserved pristine simplicity. Men spoke with low-voiced awe and appreciative twinkling of the eye of the “doings” at Littlehill; their wives thought that they might be better employed; and their children hung about the gates to watch the young man and his guests come out. There was disappointment when no one came to church from Littlehill; yet there would have been disappointment if any one had: it would have jarred with the fast-growing popular conception of the household. To the strictness of Denborough morality, by which no sin



## DENBOROUGH DETERMINES TO CALL

was leniently judged save drunkenness, Littlehill seemed a den of jovial wickedness, and its inhabitants to reck nothing of censure, human or divine.

As might be expected by all who knew him, the Mayor had no hand in this hasty and uncharitable judgment. London was no strange land to him; he went up four times a year to buy his stock; London ways were not Denshire ways, he admitted, but, for all that, they were not to be condemned offhand nor interpreted in the worst light without some pause for better knowledge.

"It takes all sorts to make a world," said he, as he drank his afternoon draught at the "Delane Arms," where the civic aristocracy was wont to gather.

"He's free enough and to spare with 'is money," said Alderman Johnstone, with satisfaction.

"You ought to know, Johnstone," remarked the Mayor significantly.

"Well, I didn't see no 'arm in him," said Mr. Maggs, the horse-dealer, a rubicund man of pleasant aspect; "and he's a rare 'un to deal with."

Interest centred on Mr. Maggs. Apparently he had spoken with Dale Bannister.

"He's half crazy, o' course," continued that gentleman, "but as pleasant-spoken, 'earty a young gent as I've seen."

"Is he crazy?" asked the girl behind the bar.

"Well, what do you say? He came down a day or two ago, 'e and 'is friend Mr. 'Ume——"

"Hume," said the Mayor, with emphasis. The Mayor, while occasionally following the worse, saw the better way.

"Yes, 'Ume. Mr. Bannister wanted a 'orse. 'What's your figger, sir?' says I. He took no



## A CHANGE OF AIR

notice, but began looking at me with 'is eyes wide open, for all the world as if I'd never spoke. Then he says, 'I want a 'orse, broad-backed and fallen in the vale o' years.' Them was 'is very words."

"You don't say?" said the girl.

"I never knowed what he meant, no more than that pint-pot; but Mr. 'Ume laughed and says, 'Don't be a fool, Dale,' and told me that Mr. Bannister couldn't ride no more than a tailor,—so he said,—and wanted a steady, quiet 'orse. He got one from me—four-and-twenty year old, warranted not to gallop. I see 'im on her to-day—and it's lucky she is quiet."

"Can't he ride?"

"No more than"—a fresh simile failed Mr. Maggs, and he concluded again—"that pint-pot. But Mr. 'Ume can. 'E's a nice set on a 'orse."

The Mayor had been meditating. He was a little jealous of Mr. Maggs' superior intimacy with the distinguished stranger, or perhaps it was merely that he was suddenly struck with a sense of remissness in his official duties.

"I think," he announced, "of callin' on him and welcomin' him to the town."

There was a chorus of approbation, broken only by a sneer from Alderman Johnstone.

"Ay, and take 'im a bottle of that cod-liver oil of yours at two-and-three. 'E can afford it."

"Not after payin' your bill, Johnstone," retorted the Mayor, with a triumphant smile. A neat repartee maketh glad the heart of the utterer.

The establishment at Littlehill and the proper course to be pursued in regard to it were also the subject of consideration in circles more genteel even than that which gathered at the "Delane



## DENBOROUGH DETERMINES TO CALL

Arms." At Dirkham Grange itself the topic was discussed, and Mr. Delane was torn with doubts whether his duty as landlord called upon him to make Dale Bannister's acquaintance, or his duty as custodian-general of the laws and proprieties of life in his corner of the world forbade any sanction being given to a household of which such reports were on the wing. People looked to the Squire, as he was commonly called, for guidance in social matters, and he was aware of the responsibility under which he lay. If he called at Littlehill, half the county would be likely enough to follow his example. And perhaps it might not be good for half the county to know Dale Bannister.

"I must consider the matter," he said at breakfast.

"Well, one does hear strange things," remarked Mrs. Delane. "And aren't his poems very odd, George?"

The Squire had not accorded to the works referred to a very close study, but he answered off-hand,

"Yes, I hear so—not at all sound in tone. But then, my dear, poets have a standard of their own."

"Of course, there was Byron," said Mrs. Delane.

"And perhaps we mustn't be too hard on him," pursued the Squire. "He's a very young man, and no doubt has considerable ability."

"I daresay he has never met anybody."

"I'm sure, papa," interposed Miss Janet Delane, "that it would have a good effect on him to meet us."

Mr. Delane smiled at his daughter.

"Would you like to know him, Jan?" he asked.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Of course I should ! He wouldn't be dull, at all events, like most of the men about here. Tora Smith said the Colonel meant to call."

"Colonel Smith is hardly in your father's position, my dear."

"Oh, since old Smith had his row with the War Office about that pension, he'll call on anybody who's for upsetting everything. It's enough for him that a man's a Radical."

"Tora means to go too," said Janet.

"Poor child ! It's a pity she hasn't a mother," said Mrs. Delane.

"I think I shall go. We can drop him if he turns out badly."

"Very well, my dear, as you think best."

"I'll walk over on Sunday. I don't suppose he objects to Sunday calls."

"Not on the ground that he wants to go to church, at all events," remarked Mrs. Delane.

"Perhaps he goes to chapel, mamma."

"Oh no, my dear, he doesn't do that." Mrs. Delane was determined to be just.

"Well, he was the son of a Dissenting minister, mamma. The *Critic* said so."

"I wonder what his father thinks of him," said the Squire, with a slight chuckle, not knowing that death had spared Dale's father all chance of trouble on his son's score.

"Mrs. Roberts told me," said Janet, "that her husband had been to see him, and liked him awfully."

"I think Roberts had better have waited," the Squire remarked, with a little frown. "In his position he ought to be very careful what he does."

"Oh, it will be all right if you call, papa."



## DENBOROUGH DETERMINES TO CALL

“It would have been better if he had let me go first.”

Mr. Delane spoke with some severity. Apart from his position of overlord of Denborough, which, indeed, he could not but feel was precarious in these innovating days, he thought he had special claims to be consulted by the Doctor. He had taken him up; his influence had gained him his appointment at Dirkham and secured him the majority of his more wealthy *clientèle*; his goodwill had opened to the young unknown man the doors of the Grange, and to his wife the privilege of considerable intimacy with the Grange ladies. It was certainly a little hasty in the Doctor not to wait for a lead from the Grange, before he flung himself into Dale Bannister's arms.

All these considerations were urged by Janet in her father's defence when his title to approve, disapprove, or in any way concern himself with Dr. Roberts' choice of friends and associates was vigorously questioned by Tora Smith. Colonel Smith—he had been Colonel Barrington-Smith, but he did not see now what a man wanted with two names—was, since his difference with the authorities, a very strong Radical; on principle he approved of anything of which his friends and neighbours were likely on principle to disapprove. Among other such things, he approved of Dale Bannister's views and works, and of the Doctor's indifference to Mr. Delane's opinion. And, just as Janet was more of a Tory than her father, Tora—she had been unhappily baptised in the absurd names of Victoria Regina in the loyal days before the grievance, but nothing was allowed to survive of them which could possibly be dropped



## A CHANGE OF AIR

—was more Radical than her father, and she ridiculed the Squire's pretensions with an extravagance which Sir Harry Fulmer, who was calling at the Smiths' when Janet came in, thought none the less charming for being very unreasonable. Sir Harry, however, suppressed his opinion on both these points,—as to its being charming, because matters had not yet reached the stage when he could declare it, and as to its being unreasonable, because he was by hereditary right the head of the Liberal party in the district, and tried honestly to live up to the position by a constant sacrifice of his dearest prejudices on the altar of progress.

“I suppose,” he said in reply to an appeal from Tora, “that a man has a right to please himself in such things.”

“After all papa has done for him! Besides, Sir Harry, you know a doctor ought to be particularly careful.”

“What is there so dreadful about Mr. Banister?” asked Tora. “He looks very nice.”

“Have you seen him, Tora?” asked Janet eagerly.

“Yes; we met him riding on such a queer old horse. He looked as if he was going to tumble off every minute; he can't ride a bit. But he's awfully handsome.”

“What's he like?”

“Oh, tall, not very broad, with beautiful eyes and a lot of waving auburn hair; he doesn't wear it clipped like a toothbrush. And he's got a long moustache, and a straight nose, and a charming smile. Hasn't he, Sir Harry?”

“I didn't notice particularly. He's not a bad-looking chap. Looks a bit soft, though.”



## DENBOROUGH DETERMINES TO CALL

“Soft? why, he’s a tremendous genius, papa says.”

“I didn’t mean that: I mean flabby and out of training, you know.”

“Oh, he isn’t always shooting or hunting, of course,” said Tora contemptuously.

“I don’t suppose,” remarked Janet, “that in his position of life—well, you know, Tora, he’s of quite humble birth—he ever had the chance.”

“He’s none the worse for that,” said Sir Harry stoutly.

“The worse? I think he’s the better. Papa is going to ask him here.”

“You’re quite enthusiastic, Tora.”

“I love to meet new people. One sees the same faces year after year in Denshire.”

Sir Harry felt that this remark was a little unkind.

“I like old friends,” he said, “better than new ones.”

Janet rose to go.

“We must wait and hear papa’s report,” she said, as she took her leave.

Tora Smith escorted her to the door, kissed her, and, returning, said, with a snap of her fingers,

“I don’t care that for ‘papa’s report.’ Jan is really too absurd.”

“It’s nice to see her——”

“Oh, delightful. I hate dutiful people!”

“You think just as much of your father.”

“We happen to agree in our opinions, but papa always tells me to use my own judgment. Are you going to see Mr. Bannister?”

“Yes, I think so. He won’t hurt me, and he may subscribe to the hunt.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"No; he may even improve you."

"Do I want it so badly, Miss Smith?"

"Yes. You're a weak-kneed man."

"Oh, I say! Look here, you must help me."

"Perhaps I will, if Mr. Bannister is not too engrossing."

"Now you're trying to draw me."

"Was I? And yet you looked pleased. Perhaps you think it a compliment."

"Isn't it one? It shows you think it worth while to——"

"It shows nothing of the kind," said Tora decisively.

Thus, for one reason or another, from one direction and another, there was converging on Littlehill a number of visitors. If your neighbour excites curiosity, it is a dull imagination that finds no plausible reason for satisfying it. Probably there was more in common than at first sight appeared between Mr. Delane's sense of duty, the Mayor's idea of official courtesy, Colonel Smith's contempt for narrowness of mind, Sir Harry Fulmer's care for the interests of the hunt, and Dr. Roberts' frank and undisguised eagerness to see and speak with Dale Bannister face to face.



## CHAPTER IV

### A QUIET SUNDAY AFTERNOON

To dissolve public report into its component parts is never a light task. Analysis as a rule reveals three constituents, truth, embroidery, and mere falsehood, but the proportions vary infinitely. Denborough, which went to bed, to a man, at ten o'clock, or so soon after as it reached home from the public-house, said that the people at Littlehill sat up very late: this was truth, at least relative truth, and that is all we can expect here. It said that they habitually danced and sang the night through: this was embroidery; they had once danced and sung the night through, when Dale had a party from London. It said that orgies—if the meaning of its nods, winks, and smiles may be summarised—went on at Littlehill: this was falsehood. Dale and his friends amused themselves, and it must be allowed that their enjoyment was not marred, but rather increased, by the knowledge that they did not command the respect of Denborough. They had no friends there. Why should they care for Denborough's approval? Denborough's approval was naught, whereas Denborough's disapproval ministered to the pleasure most of us feel in giving gentle shocks to our neighbours' sense of propriety. No doubt an electric eel enjoys itself. But, after all, if the mere truth must be told, they were mild sinners at Littlehill, the leading spirits, Dale and Arthur Angell, being indeed young men



## A CHANGE OF AIR

whose antinomianism found a harmless issue in ink, and whose lawlessness was best expressed in metre. A cynic once married his daughter to a professed atheist, on the ground that the man could not afford to be other than an exemplary husband and father. Poets are not trammelled so tight as that, for, as Mrs. Delane remarked, there was Byron, and perhaps one or two more; yet, for the most part, she who marries a poet has nothing worse than nerves to fear. But a little lawlessness will go a long way in the right place,—for example, lawn-tennis on Sunday in the suburbs,—and the Littlehill party extorted a gratifying meed of curiosity and frowns, which were not entirely undeserved by some of their doings, and were more than deserved by what was told of their doings.

After luncheon on Sunday, Mr. Delane had a nap, as his commendable custom was. Then he took his hat and stick, and set out for Littlehill. The Grange park stretches to the outskirts of the town, and borders in part on the grounds of Littlehill, so that the Squire had a pleasant walk under the cool shade of his own immemorial elms, and enjoyed the satisfaction of inspecting his own most excellent shorthorns. Reflecting on the elms and the shorthorns, and on the house, the acres, and the family that were his, he admitted that he had been born to advantages and opportunities such as fell to the lot of few men; and, inspired to charity by the distant church-bell sounding over the meadows, he acknowledged a corresponding duty of lenient judgment in respect of the less fortunate. Thus he arrived at Littlehill in a tolerant temper, and contented himself with an indulgent shake of the head when he saw the gravel fresh marked with horses' hoofs.



## A QUIET SUNDAY AFTERNOON

“Been riding instead of going to church, the young rascals,” he said to himself, as he rang the bell.

A small, shrewd-faced man opened the door and ushered Mr. Delane into the hall. Then he stopped.

“If you go straight on, sir,” said he, “through that baize door, and across the passage, and through the opposite door, you will find Mr. Bannister.”

Mr. Delane’s face expressed surprise.

“Mr. Bannister, sir,” the man explained, “don’t like visitors being announced, sir. If you would be so kind as to walk in——”

It was a harmless whim, and the Squire nodded assent. He passed through the baize door, crossed the passage, and paused before opening the opposite door. The sounds which came from behind it arrested his attention. To the accompaniment of a gentle drumming noise, as if of sticks or umbrellas bumped against the floor, a voice was declaiming, or rather chanting, poetry. The voice rose and fell, and Mr. Delane could not distinguish the words, until it burst forth triumphantly with the lines—

“Love grows hate for love’s sake, life takes death for guide.  
Night hath none but one red star—Tyrannicide.”

“Good gracious!” said Mr. Delane.

The voice dropped again for a few moments, then it hurled out—

“Down the way of Tsars awhile in vain deferred,  
Bid the Second Alexander light the Third.  
How for shame shall men rebuke them? how may we  
Blame, whose fathers died and slew, to leave us free?”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

The voice was interrupted and drowned by the crash of the pianoforte, struck with remorseless force, and another voice, the voice of a woman, cried, rising even above the crash,

“Now, one of your own, Dale.”

“I think I’d better go in,” thought Mr. Delane, and he knocked loudly at the door.

He was bidden to enter by the former of the two voices, and, going in, found himself in a billiard-room. Five or six people sat round the wall on settees, each holding a cue, with which they were still gently strumming on the floor. A stout, elderly woman was at the piano, and a young man sat cross-legged in the middle of the billiard-table, with a book in one hand and a cigar in the other. There was a good deal of tobacco smoke in the room, and Mr. Delane did not at first distinguish the faces of the company.

The young man on the table uncoiled himself with great agility, jumped down, and came forward to meet the new-comer with outstretched hands. As he outstretched them, he dropped the book and the cigar to the ground on either side of him.

“Ah, here you are! Delightful of you to come!” he cried. “Now, let me guess you!”

“Mr. Bannister?—Have I the pleasure?”

“Yes, yes. Now let’s see—don’t tell me your name.”

He drew back a step, surveyed Mr. Delane’s portly figure, his dignified carriage, his plain solid watch-chain, his square-toed strong boots.

“The Squire!” he exclaimed. “Mr. Delane, isn’t it?”

“I am Mr. Delane.”

“Good! You don’t mind being guessed, do



## A QUIET SUNDAY AFTERNOON

you? It's so much more amusing. What will you have?"

"Thank you, I've lunched, Mr. Bannister."

"Have you? We've just breakfasted—had a ride before, you know. But I must introduce you."

He searched the floor, picked up the cigar, looked at it regretfully, and threw it out of an open window.

"This," he resumed, waving his hand towards the piano, "is Mrs. Ernest Hodge. This is Miss Fane, Mrs. Hodge's daughter—No, not by a first marriage—everybody suggests that. Professional name, you know—she sings. Hodge really wouldn't do, would it, Mrs. Hodge? This is Philip Hume. This is Arthur Angell, who writes verses—like me. This is—but I expect you know these gentlemen?"

Mr. Delane peered through the smoke which Philip Hume was producing from a long pipe, and to his amazement discerned three familiar faces—those of Dr. Roberts, the Mayor, and Alderman Johnstone. The Doctor was flushed and looked excited; the Mayor was a picture of dignified complacency; Johnstone appeared embarrassed and uncomfortable, for his bald head was embellished with a flowery garland. Dale saw Mr. Delane's eye rest on this article.

"We always crown anybody who adds to our knowledge," he explained. "He gets a wreath of honour. The Alderman added to our knowledge of the expense of building a room. So Miss Fane crowned him."

An appreciative chuckle from the Mayor followed this explanation; he knocked the butt of his cue against the floor, and winked at Philip Hume.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

The last-named, seeing that Mr. Delane was somewhat surprised at the company, came up to him and said,

“Come and sit down; Dale never remembers that anybody wants a seat. Here’s an armchair.”

Mr. Delane sat down next to Miss Fane, and noticed, even in his perturbation, that his neighbour was a remarkably pretty girl, with fair hair clustering in a thick mass on the nape of her neck, and large blue eyes which left gazing on Dale Bannister when their owner turned to greet him. Mr. Delane would have enjoyed talking to her, had not his soul been vexed at the presence of the three Denborough men. One did not expect to meet the tradesmen of the town; and what business had the Doctor there? To spend Sunday in that fashion would not increase his popularity or his practice. And then that nonsense about the wreath! How undignified it was—it was even worse than yelling out Nihilistic verses by way of Sabbath amusement.

“I shall get away as soon as I can,” he thought, “and I shall say a word to the Doctor.”

He was called from his meditations by Miss Fane. She sat in a low chair with her feet on a stool, and now, tilting the chair back, she fixed her eyes on Mr. Delane, and asked,

“Are you shocked?”

No man likes to admit that he is shocked.

“I am not, but many people would be.”

“I suppose you don’t like meeting those men?”

“Hedger is an honest man in his way of life. I have no great opinion of Johnstone.”

“This is your house, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”



## A QUIET SUNDAY AFTERNOON

"All the houses about here are yours, aren't they?"

"Most of them are, Miss Fane."

"Then you are a great man?"

The question was put so simply, that Mr. Delane could not suspect a sarcastic intent.

"Only locally," he answered, smiling.

"Have you any daughters?" she asked.

"Yes, one."

"What is she like?"

"Fancy asking her father! I think Janet a beauty."

"Fair or dark?"

"Dark."

"Dale likes dark girls. Tall or short?"

"Tall."

"Good eyes?"

"I like them."

"Oh, that'll do. Dale will like her;" and Miss Fane nodded reassuringly. Mr. Delane had not the heart to intimate his indifference to Dale Bannister's opinion of his daughter.

"Do you know this country?" he asked, by way of conversation.

"We've only been here a week, but we've ridden a good deal. We hold Dale on, you know."

"You are on a visit to Mr. Bannister?"

"Oh yes, mother and I are here."

Mr. Delane could not help wondering whether their presence was such a matter of course as her tone implied, but before he could probe the matter further, he heard Dale exclaim,

"Oh, it's a wretched thing! Read it yourself, Roberts."

"Mount him on the rostrum," cried the young



## A CHANGE OF AIR

man who had been presented to Mr. Delane as Arthur Angell, and who had hitherto been engaged in an animated discussion with the Doctor.

Laughing, and only half resisting, the Doctor allowed himself to be hoisted on to the billiard-table, sat down, and announced in a loud voice—

“*Blood for Blood*: by Dale Bannister.”

The poem which bore this alarming title was perhaps the most outrageous of the author's works. It held up to ridicule and devoted to damnation every person and every institution which the Squire respected and worshipped. And the misguided young man declaimed it with sparkling eyes and emphasising gestures, as though every wicked word of it were gospel. And to this man's charge were committed the wives and families of the citizens of Denborough! The Squire's self-respect demanded a protest. He rose with dignity, and went up to his host.

“Good-bye, Mr. Bannister.”

“What? you're not going yet? What? Does this stuff bore you?”

“It does not bore me. But I must add—excuse an old-fashioned fellow—that it does something worse.”

“What? Oh, you're the other side? Of course you are!”

“Whatever side I was, I could not listen to that. As an older man, let me give you a word of advice.”

Dale lifted his hands in good-humoured protest.

“Sorry you don't like it,” he said. “Shut up, Roberts. If I'd known, we wouldn't have had it. But it's true—true—true.”

The Doctor listened with sparkling eyes.



## A QUIET SUNDAY AFTERNOON

“I must differ utterly—I must indeed. Good-bye, Mr. Bannister. Hedger!”

The Mayor started.

“I am walking into the town. Come with me.”

The Mayor wavered. The Squire stood and waited for him.

“I didn’t think of goin’ yet, Mr. Delane, sir.”

Dale watched the encounter with a smile.

“Your wife will expect you,” said the Squire. “Come along.”

The Mayor rose, ignoring Johnstone’s grin and the amusement on the faces of the company.

“I’ll come and look you up,” said Dale, pressing the Squire’s hand warmly. “Oh, it’s all right. Tastes differ. I’m not offended. I’ll come some day this week.”

He showed them out, and, returning, said to the Doctor, “Roberts, you’ll get into trouble.”

“Nonsense!” said the Doctor. “What business is it of his?”

Dale had turned to Johnstone.

“Good-bye,” said he abruptly. “We close at five.”

“I’ve ’ad a pleasant afternoon, sir.”

“It will be deducted from your bill,” answered Dale.

After ejecting Johnstone, he stood by the table, looking moodily at the floor.

“What’s the matter, Dale?” asked Miss Fane.

“I suppose he thought we were beasts or lunatics.”

“Probably,” said Philip Hume. “What then?”

“Well, yes,” answered Dale, smiling again.

“You’re quite right, Phil. What then?”



## CHAPTER V

### THE NECESSARY SCAPEGOAT

IF men never told their wives anything, the condition of society would no doubt be profoundly modified, though it is not easy to forecast the precise changes. If a guess may be hazarded, it is probable that much less good would be done, and some less evil said : the loss of matter of interest for half the world may be allowed to sway the balance in favour of the present practice—a practice so universal that Mr. Delane, the Mayor, and Alderman Johnstone one and all followed it by telling their wives about their Sunday afternoon at Littlehill. Dr. Roberts, it is true, gave a meagre account to his wife, but the narratives of the other three amply filled the gaps he left, and as each of them naturally dwelt on the most remarkable features of their entertainment, it may be supposed that the general impression produced in Market Denborough did not fall short of the truth in vividness of colour. The facts as to what occurred have been set down without extenuation and without malice : the province of Market Denborough society was to supply the inferences arising therefrom, and this task it fulfilled with no grudging hand. Before eight-and-forty hours had passed, there were reports that the Squire had discovered a full-blown Saturnalia in process at Littlehill—and that in these scandalous proceedings the Mayor, Alderman Johnstone, and Dr. Roberts were participators.



## THE NECESSARY SCAPEGOAT

Then ensued conduct on the part of the Mayor and the Alderman deserving of unmeasured scorn. They could not deny that dreadful things had been done and said, though they had not seen the deeds nor understood the words: their denial would have had no chance of credit. They could not venture to say that Squire Delane had done anything except manfully protest. They began by accusing one another in round terms, but each found himself so vulnerable that by an unholy tacit compact they agreed to exonerate one another. The Mayor allowed that Johnstone was not conspicuous in wickedness; Johnstone admitted that the Mayor had erred, if at all, only through weakness and good-nature. Public opinion demanded a sacrifice; and the Doctor was left to satisfy it. Everybody was of one mind in holding that Dr. Roberts had disgraced himself, and nobody was surprised to hear that the Squire's phaeton had been seen standing at his door for half an hour on Wednesday morning. The Squire was within, and was understood to be giving the Doctor a piece of his mind.

The Doctor was stiff-necked.

"It is entirely a private matter," said he, "and no one has a right to dictate to me."

"My dear Roberts, I spoke merely in your own interest. It would ruin you if it became known that you held those atrocious opinions; and become known it must, if you openly ally yourself with this young man."

"I am not the servant of the people I attend. I may choose my own opinions."

"Yes, and they may choose their own doctor," retorted the Squire.

The two parted, almost quarrelling. Perhaps



## A CHANGE OF AIR

they would have quite quarrelled had not the Squire thought of Mrs. Roberts and the baby. He wondered that the Doctor did not think of them too, but he seemed to Mr. Delane to be under such a spell that he thought of nothing but Dale Bannister. It was not as if Roberts were the only medical man in the place. There was young Dr. Spink—and he was a real M.D.—up the street, ready and eager to snap up stray patients. And Dr. Spink was a churchwarden. The Squire did not like him overmuch, but he found himself thinking whether it would not be well to send for him next time there was a case of illness at the Grange.

The Squire meditated, while others acted. On her walk the same afternoon, Ethel Roberts heard news which perturbed her. The Vicar's wife was ill, and Dr. Spink had been sent for. The Vicar was a well-to-do man. He had a large family, which yet grew. He had been a constant and a valuable client of her husband's. And now Dr. Spink was sent for.

"Jim," she said, "did you know that Mrs. Gilkison was ill?"

"Ill?" said the Doctor, looking up from *Sluggards*. "No, I've heard nothing of it."

She came and leant over his chair.

"They've sent for Dr. Spink," she said.

"What?" he exclaimed, dropping his beloved volume.

"Mrs. Hedger told me."

"Well, they can do as they like. I suppose his 'Doctor' is the attraction."

"Do you think it's that, dear?"

"What else can it be?—unless it's a mere freak."



## THE NECESSARY SCAPEGOAT

“ Well, Jim, I thought—I thought perhaps that the Vicar had heard about—about Littlehill—Yes, I know it’s very stupid and narrow, dear—but still——”

The Doctor swore under his breath.

“ I can’t help it if the man’s an ass,” he said.

Ethel smiled patiently.

“ It’s a pity to offend people, Jim dear, isn’t it ? ”

“ Are you against me too, Ethel ? ”

“ Against you ? You know I never would be, but——”

“ Then do let us leave Denborough gossip alone. Fancy Denborough taking on itself to disapprove of Dale Bannister ! It’s too rich.”

Ethel sighed. Denborough’s disapproval was no doubt a matter of indifference to Dale Bannister : it meant loss of bread and butter to James Roberts and his house.

Meanwhile, Dale Bannister, all unconscious of the dread determinations of the Vicar, pursued his way in cheerful unconcern. People came and went. Arthur Angell returned to his haunts, rather dissatisfied with the quiet of Littlehill, but rejoicing to have found in the Doctor one thorough-going believer. Mrs. Hodge, her daughter, and Philip Hume seemed to be permanent parts of the household. Riding was their chief amusement. They would pass down High Street, Dale on his ancient mare, with Nellie and Philip by his side, laughing and talking merrily, Dale’s own voice being very audible as he pointed out, with amusement a trifle too obvious to be polite, what struck him as remarkable in Denborough ways of life.

Philip, however, whom Mr. Delane had described to his wife as the only apparently sane person at



## A CHANGE OF AIR

Littlehill, was rather uneasy in his mind about Roberts.

"You'll get that fellow disliked, Dale," he said one morning, "if you don't take care."

"I? What have I to do with it?" asked Dale.

"They'll think him unsafe, if they see him with you."

"He needn't come unless he likes. He's not a bad fellow, only he takes everything so precious seriously."

"He thinks you do, judging by your books."

"Oh, I do—by fits. By the way, I have a fit now! Behold, I will write! Nellie! Where's Nellie?"

Nellie Fane came at his call.

"Sit down just opposite me, and look at me. I am going to write. The editor of the *Cynosure* begs for twenty lines—no more—twenty lines—fifty pounds! Now, Nellie, inspire me, and you shall have a new hat out of it. No, look at me!"

Nellie sat down and gazed at him, obediently.

"Two pound ten a line—not bad for a young 'un," he pursued. "They say Byron wrote on gin and water. I write on your eyes, Nellie—much better."

"You're not writing at all—only talking nonsense."

"I'm just beginning."

"Look here, Dale, why don't you keep the Doctor—" began Philip.

"Oh, hang the Doctor! I'd just got an idea. Look at me, Nellie!"

Philip shrugged his shoulders, and Dr. Roberts dropped out of discussion.



## THE NECESSARY SCAPEGOAT

The twenty lines were written, though they were never considered one of his masterpieces ; then Dale rose with a sigh of relief.

“ Now for lunch, and then I’m going to return Mr. Delane’s call.”

“ I thought we were to ride,” said Nellie disappointedly.

“ Well, won’t you come ? ”

“ Don’t be absurd ! ”

“ Mightn’t she come, Phil ? ”

“ Mrs. Delane has not called, has she ? ” inquired Philip, as though for information.

“ Of course I sha’n’t go, Dale. You must go alone.”

“ What a nuisance ! I shall have to walk. I daren’t trust myself to that animal alone.”

After luncheon he started, walking by the same way by which Mr. Delane had come.

He reached the lodge of the Grange ; a curtseying child held open the gate, and he passed along under the immemorial elms, returning a cheery good-day to the gardeners, who paused in their work to touch their hats with friendly deference. The deference was wrong, of course, but the friendliness pleased him, and even the deference seemed somehow in keeping with the elms and with the sturdy old red-brick mansion, with its coat-of-arms and defiant Norman motto over the principal door. Littlehill was a pleasant house, but it had none of the ancient dignity of Dirkham, and Dale’s quick brain was suddenly struck with a new understanding of how such places bred the men they did. He had had a fancy for a stay in the country ; it would amuse him, he thought, to study country life : that was the meaning of his coming to Littlehill. Well,



## A CHANGE OF AIR

Dirkham summed up one side of country life, and he would be glad to study it.

Mr. Delane was not at home—he had gone to Petty Sessions; and Dale, with regret, for he wanted to see the inside of the house, left his name—as usual he had forgotten to bring a card—and turned away. As he turned, a pony carriage drew up and a girl jumped out. Dale drew back to let her pass, raising his hat. The servant said a word to her, and when he had gone some ten or fifteen yards, he heard his name called.

“Oh, Mr. Bannister, do come in! I expect papa back every minute, and he will be so sorry to miss you. Mamma is up in London; but I hope you’ll come in.”

Dale had no idea of refusing the invitation given so cordially. He had been sorry to go away before, and the sight of Janet Delane made him more reluctant still. He followed her into the oak-panelled hall, hung with pictures of dead Delanes and furnished with couches and easy-chairs.

“Well,” she said, after tea was brought, “and what do you think of us?”

“I have not seen very much of you yet.”

“As far as you have gone? And be candid.”

“You are very restful.”

She made a little grimace.

“You mean very slow?”

“Indeed I don’t. I think you very interesting.”

“You find us interesting, but slow. Yes, you meant that, Mr. Bannister, and it’s not kind.”

“Have your revenge by telling me what you think of me.”

“Oh, we find you interesting too. We’re all talking about you.”



## THE NECESSARY SCAPEGOAT

"And slow?"

"No, certainly not slow," she said, with a smile and a glance: the glance should be described, if it were describable, but it was not.

Dale, however, understood it, for he replied, laughing,

"They've been prejudicing you against me."

"I don't despair of you. I think you may be reformed. But I'm afraid you're very bad just now."

"Why do you think that? From what your father said?"

"Partly. Partly also because Colonel Smith and Tora—do you know them?—are so enthusiastic about you."

"Is that a bad sign?"

"Terrible. They are quite revolutionary. So are you, aren't you?"

"Not in private life."

"But of course," she asked, with serious eyes, "you believe what you write?"

"Well, I do; but you pay writers a compliment by saying 'of course.'"

"Oh, I hope not. Anything is better than insincerity."

"Even my opinions?"

"Yes. Opinions may be changed, but not natures, you know."

She was still looking at him with serious, inquiring eyes. The eyes were very fine eyes. Perhaps that was the reason why Dale thought the last remark so excellent. He said nothing, and she went on.

"People who are clever and—and great, you know, ought to be so careful that they are right, oughtn't they?"



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Oh, a rhymer rhymes as the fit takes him," answered he, with affected modesty.

"I wouldn't believe that of you. You wouldn't misuse your powers like that."

"You have read my poetry?"

"Some of it." She paused and added, with a little blush for her companion, "There was some papa would not let me read."

A man may not unreasonably write what a young girl's father may very reasonably not like her to read. Nevertheless, Dale Bannister felt rather uncomfortable.

"Those were the shocking political ones, I suppose?" he asked.

"No, I read most of those. These were against religion and——"

"Well?"

"Morality, papa said," she answered, with the same grave look of inquiry.

Dale rose and held out his hand, saying petulantly,

"Good-bye, Miss Delane. You evidently don't think me fit to enter your house."

"Oh, now I have made you angry. I have no right to speak about it, and, of course, I know nothing about it. Only——"

"Only what?"

"Some things are right and some wrong, aren't they?"

"Oh, granted,—if we could only agree which were which."

"As to some we have been told. And I don't think that about you at all—I really don't. Do wait till papa comes."

Dale sat down again. He had had his lecture;



## THE NECESSARY SCAPEGOAT

experience told him that a lecture from such lecturers is tolerably often followed by a petting, and the pettings were worth the lectures. In this instance he was disappointed. Janet did not pet him, though she displayed much friendliness, and he took his leave (for the Squire did not appear) feeling somewhat put out.

Approbation and applause were dear to this man, who seemed to spend his energies in courting blame and distrust ; whatever people thought of his writings, he wished them to be fascinated by him. He was not sure that he had fascinated Miss Delane.

“ I should like to see more of her,” he thought.  
“ She’s rather an odd girl.”



## CHAPTER VI

### LITTLEHILL GOES INTO SOCIETY

MR. DELANE'S late return from his public duties was attributable simply to Colonel Smith's obstinacy. He and the Colonel sat together on the bench, and very grievously did they quarrel over the case of a man who had been caught in possession of the body of a fresh-killed hare. They differed first as to the policy of the law, secondly as to its application, thirdly as to its vindication ; and when the Vicar of Denborough, who was a county justice and present with them, sided with the Squire on all these points, the Colonel angrily denounced the reverend gentleman as a disgrace, not only to the judicial bench, but even to his own cloth. All this took time, as did also the Colonel's cross-examination of the constable in charge of the case, and it was evening before the dispute was ended, and a fine imposed. The Colonel paid the fine, and thus every one, including the law and the prisoner, was in the end satisfied.

Mr. Delane and the Colonel, widely and fiercely as they differed on every subject under the sun, were very good friends, and they rode home together in the dusk of a September evening, for their roads lay the same way for some distance. Presently they fell in with Sir Harry Fulmer, who had been to see Dale Bannister, and, in his absence, had spent the afternoon with Nellie Fane and Philip Hume.



## LITTLEHILL GOES INTO SOCIETY

“Hume’s quite a good fellow,” he declared; “quiet, you know, and rather sarcastic, but quite a gentleman. And Miss Fane—I say, have you seen her, Colonel?”

“By the way, who is Miss Fane?” asked the Squire.

“Oh, she acts, or sings, or something. Awfully jolly girl, and uncommon pretty. Don’t you think so, Squire?”

“Yes, I did, Harry. But why is she staying there?”

“Really, Delane,” said the Colonel, “what possible business is that of yours?”

“I’ve called on Bannister, and he’s going to return my call. I think it’s a good deal of business of mine.”

“Well!” exclaimed the Colonel; “for sheer uncharitableness and the thinking of all evil, give me a respectable Christian man like yourself, Delane.”

“Oh, it’s all right,” said Sir Harry cheerfully. “The old lady, Mrs. What’s-her-name, is there.”

“I hope it is,” said the Squire. “Bannister has himself to thank for any suspicions which may be aroused.”

“Suspicious? Bosh!” said the Colonel. “They are all coming to dine with me to-morrow. I met Bannister and asked him. He said he had friends, and I told him to bring the lot. Will you and Mrs. Delane come, Squire?”

“My wife’s away, thanks.”

“Then bring Janet.”

“Hum! I think I’ll wait.”

“Oh, as you please. You’ll come, Harry?”

Sir Harry was delighted to come.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Tora was most anxious to know them," the Colonel continued, "and I hate ceremonious ways. There'll be nobody else, except the Doctor and his wife."

"You haven't asked Hedger and Johnstone, have you?" inquired the Squire. "They're friends of Bannister's. I met them at his house."

"I haven't, but I don't know why I shouldn't."

"Still you won't," said Sir Harry, with a laugh.

The Colonel knew that he would not, and changed the subject.

"This is a great occasion," said Philip Hume at afternoon tea next day. "To-night we are to be received into county society."

"Is Colonel Smith 'county society'?" asked Nellie.

"Yes. The Mayor told me so. The Colonel is a Radical, and a bad one at that, but the poor man comes of good family and is within the toils."

"I expect he really likes it," said Nellie. "I should."

"Are you nervous?" inquired Philip.

Nellie laughed and coloured.

"I really am a little. I hope I shall behave properly. Mother is in a dreadful state."

"Where is Mrs. Hodge?"

"Putting some new lace on her gown."

"And Dale?"

"He's writing. Mr. Hume, has he told you anything about his visit yesterday?"

"Yes. He says he met an angel."

"Oh, that accounts for the title."

"What title?"

"Why, I went and looked over his shoulder, and saw he was beginning some verses, headed



## LITTLEHILL GOES INTO SOCIETY

‘To a Pretty Saint.’ I always look, you know, but this time he snatched the paper away.”

“ ‘To a Pretty Saint ’? Dear, dear! Perhaps he meant you, Nellie.”

Miss Fane shook her head.

“He meant Miss Delane, I’m sure,” she said dolefully. “I hope Miss Smith is just exactly a county young lady—you know what I mean. I want to see one.”

“Do you contemplate remodelling yourself?”

“I’m sure Dale will like that sort of girl.”

Philip looked at her sideways. He thought of telling her that “county young ladies” did not proclaim all their thoughts. But then he reflected that he would not.

The Littlehill party arrived at Mount Pleasant, the Colonel’s residence, in the nick of time; and Mrs. Hodge sailed in to dinner on her host’s arm in high good humour. Dale, as the great man and the stranger, escorted Tora, Philip Hume Mrs. Roberts, and Sir Harry fell to Nellie’s lot.

Mrs. Hodge was an amusing companion. She did not dally at the outworks of acquaintance, but closed at once into intimacy, and before half an hour was gone, she found herself trying hard not to call the Colonel “my dear,” and to remember to employ the usual prefixes to the names of the company. The Colonel was delighted; was he at last escaping from the stifling prison of conventionality and breathing a freer air?

Unhappily, just in proportion as good cheer and good fellowship put Mrs. Hodge at her ease, and made her more and more to the Colonel’s taste, her daughter’s smothered uneasiness grew more intense. Nellie had borne herself with an impossible



## A CHANGE OF AIR

dignity and distance of manner towards Sir Harry, in the fear lest Sir Harry should find her wanting in the characteristics of good society, and her frigidity was increased by her careful watch on her mother's conduct. Sir Harry was disappointed. As he could not sit by Tora Smith, he had consoled himself with the prospect of some fun with "little Miss Fane." And little Miss Fane held him at arms' length. He determined to try to break down her guard.

"How did you manage to shock the Squire so?" he asked.

"Was he shocked? I didn't know."

"You were there, weren't you?"

"Oh yes. Well, I suppose it was Mr. Bannister's poetry."

"Why should that shock him?" asked Sir Harry, who knew very well. "By Jove, I wish I could write some like it!"

She turned to him with sudden interest.

"Do you admire Dale's writings?"

"Awfully," said Sir Harry. "Don't you?"

"Of course *I* do, but I didn't know whether you would. Do you know Miss Delane?"

"Yes, very well."

"Do you like her?"

"Oh yes. I have known her all my life, and I like her. She frightens me a little, you know."

"Does she? How?"

"She expects such a lot of a fellow. Have you met her?"

"No. D—Mr. Bannister has. He likes her."

"I expect she blew him up, didn't she?"

"Oh, I shouldn't think so. Dale wouldn't like that."



## LITTLEHILL GOES INTO SOCIETY

"Depends how it's done," observed Sir Harry.  
"Don't you ever blow him up?"

"Of course not. I'm much too—I look up to him too much."

They were interrupted by the Colonel's voice. He was saying, with much energy,

"Ability we don't expect in a Government office, but honesty one might hope for."

"Just what Hodge used to say of old Pratt," said Mrs. Hodge.

"I beg pardon?" said the Colonel.

"Pratt was his manager, you know—my husband's."

"Oh yes, of course."

"Nellie, you remember your father throwing down that two pound ten on the table, and saying, 'Well, I'm——',"

"No, mother, I don't. Do you think I could learn to hunt, Sir Harry?"

"Of course you could, in no time."

"Does Miss Delane?"

"And Pratt said that if Hodge couldn't play the king at two pound ten a week—though that's hard living, my dear—I beg pardon—Colonel——"

The Colonel bowed courteously. Nellie grew very red.

"Why, bantam-cocks had risen since his day, and that was all about it." And Mrs. Hodge emptied her glass and beamed pleasantly on the company.

Suddenly Dale Bannister began to laugh gently. Tora Smith turned an inquiring look in his direction.

"What is it, Mr. Bannister?"

"I saw your father's butler looking at my friend Mrs. Hodge."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"What nonsense! Simmons is not allowed to look at any one."

"Isn't he? Why not?"

"No good servant does."

Dale smiled.

"I know what you mean," Tora continued; "but surely while they're actually waiting, Mr. Bannister, we can't treat them quite like ourselves? At any other time, of course——"

"You'd take a walk with them?"

"They'd be horribly uncomfortable if I did," she answered, laughing.

"That's the worst of it," said he.

"Do you think us great shams?"

"I have come to learn, not to criticise."

"We want a leader," said Tora, with pretty earnestness.

"Haven't you one?"

"Sir Harry Fulmer is our leader, but we're not contented with him. He's a very mild Radical. Won't you come to our help?"

"I expect I should be too extreme the other way."

"Oh, I love people who are extreme,—in my direction, I mean."

"Well, then, try the Doctor."

"Mr. Roberts? Oh, he's hardly prominent enough; we must have somebody of position. Now, what are you laughing at, Mr. Bannister?"

The gentleman to whom they referred sat looking on at them with no great pleasure, though they found one another entertaining enough to prevent them noticing him. Dale Bannister said that his new friend took life seriously, and the charge was too true for the Doctor's happiness.



## LITTLEHILL GOES INTO SOCIETY

Dale Bannister had taken hold of his imagination. He expected Dale to do all he would give his life to see done, but could not do himself; the effect of Dale was to be instantaneous, enormous, transforming Denborough and its inhabitants. He regarded the poet much as a man might look upon a benevolent volcano, did such a thing exist in the order of nature. His function was, in the Doctor's eyes, to pour forth the burning lava of truth and justice, wherewith the ignorance, prejudice, and cruelty of the present order should be consumed and smothered; let the flood be copious, scorching, and unceasing! The Doctor could do little more than hail the blessed shower and declare its virtues; but that he was ready to do at any cost. And the volcano would not act! The eruptions were sadly intermittent. The hero, instead of going forth to war, was capering nimbly in a lady's chamber, to the lascivious pleasing of a lute; that is to say, he was talking trifles to Tora Smith, with apparent enjoyment, forgetful of his mission, ignoring the powers of darkness around. No light-spreading saying, no sword-flash had come from him all the evening. He was fiddling while Rome was—waiting for the burning it needed so badly.

Perhaps it was a woebegone look about the Doctor that made Philip Hume take the chair next him after dinner, while Dale was, still as if in play, emitting anarchist sparks for the Colonel's entertainment.

"Is it possible," asked the Doctor in low, half-angry tones, "that he thinks these people are any good—that they are sincere or thorough in the matter? He's wasting his time."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Well, well, my dear fellow, we must all dine, whatever our opinions."

"Oh yes, we must dine, while the world starves."

"The bow can't be always stretched," said Philip, with a slight smile.

"You don't think, Hume, do you, that he's getting any less—less in earnest, you know?"

"Oh, he wrote a scorcher this very morning."

"Did he? That's good news. Where is it to appear?"

"I don't know. He didn't write it on commission."

"His poems have such magnificent restlessness, haven't they? I can't bear to see him idle."

"Poor Dale! You must give him some holidays. He likes pleasure like the rest of us."

The Doctor sighed impatiently, and Philip, looking at him anxiously, laid a hand on his arm.

"Roberts," he said, "there is no need that you should be ground to powder."

"I don't understand."

"I hope you never will. Your wife doesn't look very strong. Why don't you give her a change?"

"A change? How am I to afford a change? Besides, who wants a change? What change do most workers get?"

"Hang most workers! Your wife wants a change."

"I haven't got the money, anyhow."

"Then there's an end of it."

The Colonel rose, and they made for the drawing-room.



## LITTLEHILL GOES INTO SOCIETY

Philip detained his companion for a moment.

“Well?” said the Doctor, feeling the touch on his arm.

“For God’s sake, old fellow, go slow,” said Philip, pressing his arm, and looking at him with an appealing smile.



## CHAPTER VII

### “TO A PRETTY SAINT”

WHEN Mrs. Delane came back from London, she was met with a question of the precise kind on which she felt herself to be no mean authority. It was a problem of propriety, of etiquette, and of the usages of society, and Mrs. Delane attacked it with a due sense of its importance and with the pleasure of an expert. It arose out of Dale Bannister's call at the Grange. Dale had been accustomed, when a lady found favour in his eyes, to inform her of the gratifying news through the medium of a set of verses, more or less enthusiastic and rhapsodic in their nature. The impulse to follow his usual practice was strong on him after meeting Janet Delane, and issued in the composition of that poem called “To a Pretty Saint,” the title of which Nellie had seen. He copied it out fair, and was about to put it in the post, when a thought suddenly struck him. Miss Delane was not quite like most of his acquaintances. It was perhaps possible that she might think his action premature, or even impertinent, and that she might deem it incumbent on her to resent being called either a saint or pretty by a friend of one interview's standing. Dale was divided between his new-born doubt of his own instinct of what was permissible, and his great reluctance to doom his work to suppression. He decided to consult Philip Hume, who was, as



## “TO A PRETTY SAINT”

he knew, more habituated to the social atmosphere of places like Denshire.

“Eh? what?” said Philip, who was busily engaged in writing a newspaper article. “Written a poem to a girl? All right. I’ll listen presently.”

“I don’t want you to listen. I want your advice as to whether to send it or not.”

“If you’ve wasted your time writing the thing,—by the way, take care the Doctor doesn’t hear of it,—you may as well send it.”

“The question is, whether she’ll be offended.”

“I’m glad it isn’t more important, because I’m busy.”

“Look here! Stop that anonymous stabber of yours and listen. It’s to Miss Delane.”

Philip stopped in the middle of a particularly vicious paragraph of the “stabber,” and looked up with amusement on his face.

“It’s a perfectly—you know—suitable poem,” pursued Dale. “The only question is, will she think it a liberty?”

“Oh, send it. They like getting ’em;” and Philip took up his pen again.

“You don’t know the sort of girl she is.”

“Then what the deuce is the good of asking me? Ask Nellie.”

“No, I sha’n’t,” said Dale shortly.

Thus thrown, by his friend’s indifference, on his own judgment, Dale made up his mind to send the verses,—he could not deny himself the pleasure,—but, half alarmed at his own audacity, which feeling was a new one in him, he “hedged” by enclosing with them a letter of an apologetic character. Miss Delane was not to suppose that he took the liberty of referring to her in the terms of his



## A CHANGE OF AIR

title : the little copy of verses had merely been suggested by a remark she made. He had failed to find an answer on the spot. Would she pardon him for giving his answer now in this indirect way?—and so forth.

The verses, with their accompanying letter, were received by Janet, and Janet had no doubt of what she did feel about them, but some considerable doubt as to what she ought to feel ; so she carried them to her mother. Mrs. Delane put on her *pince-nez* and read the documents in the case.

“I’m sure he didn’t mean to be—anything but what’s nice, mamma,” said Janet.

“I daresay not, my dear. The question is, whether the young man knows his manners. Let’s see.”

After careful perusal, during which Janet watched her mother’s face with some anxiety, Mrs. Delane delivered judgment.

“There’s no positive harm in them,” she said, “and I don’t think we need take any actual steps. Still, Janet, he is evidently to be treated with discretion.”

“How do you mean, mamma?”

“Well, he isn’t in need of encouragement, is he? He’s not backward in making friends.”

“I suppose not. May I keep them?”

“Keep them? Do you want to keep them?”

“Not particularly, dear,” answered Janet. “I—I thought he meant me to.”

“No doubt. Write a civil note, dear, thank him for letting you see them, and return them enclosed.”

Janet was a little reluctant to part with her autograph manuscript,—not because of its pecuniary



## “TO A PRETTY SAINT”

value, though that was more than a trifle, had she known, but because such things are pleasant possessions to show to envious friends,—but she did as she was told. She did not, however, feel herself bound altogether to smother her pride or to make a secret of the tribute she had received. Tora Smith heard the story with evident amusement, and, thinking that others would share her appreciation of it, relieved the somewhat uphill course of Mrs. Hodge's call by a repetition of it: whereby it happened that Nellie Fane came to know, not only that Dale had written verses to Miss Delane and sent them, but also that Miss Delane had returned the offering. She told Philip the latter fact, and the two ventured to rally the poet on the occurrence. Dale took their action very badly, and his displeasure soon reduced Nellie to apologies. Philip was less sensitive.

“D. W. T., by Jove!” he remarked. “Quite like old times, Dale!”

Dale muttered something about “infernally chattering.”

“You will soon be in a position to publish a volume of ‘Rejected Addresses.’”

“Not at all,” said Dale. “It's simply that she didn't understand I meant her to keep them.”

“Oh, that's her delicate way of snubbing you, my boy.”

“What the deuce do you know about it, Phil? You never wrote verses in your life. Don't you agree with me, Nellie?”

“Miss Smith said Miss Delane thought she had better not keep them.”

“I knew that girl was a gossip directly I set eyes on her.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“You’re naturally hurt, old fellow, but——”

“Go to the deuce! Look here, I’ll bet you a fiver she takes them back and keeps them.”

“Done!” said Philip, and Dale seized his hat.

“Why does he want her to take them?” asked Nellie.

“Vanity, my dear, vanity. I suppose he’s accustomed to having his verses laid up in lavender. Is that what you do with yours?”

“He never wrote me any,” answered Nellie in a tone of superlative indifference.

It being only two o’clock, Dale felt he could not yet go to the Grange. He made a *détour* by the town, on pretence of buying stamps; and, the stars fighting with him, outside the Mayor’s shop he saw Janet talking to the Mayor himself.

“Thank you, Miss Delane, miss,” said the Mayor. “Mrs. Hedger is doin’ nicely. She had a bit of feverishness about her, but Dr. Spink’s treated her wonderful.”

“Dr. Spink? I thought you went to Dr. Roberts?”

“I did, miss, but— Well, things come round to me, miss, being a centre like.”

“What things?”

“Well, you may not have heard, miss, of the things that— Good-mornin’, Mr. Bannister, sir, good-mornin’. A fine day. Anything in our line, sir?”

“Good-morning, Mr. Mayor,” said Dale. “Ah, Miss Delane, how do you do?”

His coming interrupted Janet’s investigations into the affairs of the Doctor, and she took her leave of the Mayor, Dale assuming permission to walk with her. He ought to have asked, no doubt,



## “TO A PRETTY SAINT”

thought Janet, but it would be making too much of it to tell him so.

They had hardly started, when he turned to her, “Why did you send back my verses?”

“I could hardly venture to keep them, could I?”

“Why not?”

“On so slight an acquaintance! It was very kind of you to let me see them before they were published.”

“They’re not going to be published.”

“Oh, you must publish them. They’re so very pretty.”

“Didn’t you think I meant you to keep them?”

“I should have been very conceited if I had, shouldn’t I?”

“Well, they were for you—not to be published. If you don’t like them, they’ll be burnt, that’s all.”

Janet stole a glance at his face: he looked like a petulant Apollo—so she thought.

“That would be a pity,” she said gravely; “but I don’t think I ought to keep them.”

“Why not?”

Socrates is reported to have said that nothing is reasonable which cannot be stated in a reasonable form. Miss Janet Delane would have dissented.

“Of course I like them very much. But—well, we haven’t known each other very long, Mr. Bannister.”

“You mean it was impertinent?”

“Oh no. I thought your letter perfect—I did really. But mamma thought——”

“Oh!” said Dale, with brightening face. “You would have kept them?”

“That’s not the question,” said Janet, smiling. It was pleasant to see Apollo looking less petulant.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"But what would people say if they heard I had poems of Mr. Dale Bannister's about me? I should be thought a dangerous person."

"I'll write some which you would like to have."

"I am sure you could, if you only would. Fancy, if you wrote really noble verses—worthy of you!"

"Well, I will, if it will please you."

"Nonsense, Mr. Bannister! There's no question of pleasing me: it doesn't matter—well, I mean, then, the great thing is to do justice to yourself."

"I ought to have some encouragement in well-doing," said Dale plaintively.

She shook her head with a smile, and he went on,

"I wish you'd come to Littlehill and see the house. I've improved it tremendously."

"Oh, you must invite mamma."

"Would Mrs. Delane come?"

This question was a little awkward, for Mrs. Delane, after cross-examining Tora Smith closely as to Mrs. Hodge and her daughter, had announced that she would not go.

"A bachelor doesn't entertain ladies, does he?"

"I should like to; and there are some ladies—" A sudden thought struck him, and he stopped. He looked so pointedly at Janet, that, to her intense annoyance, she felt herself blushing. She made the grave mistake of changing the conversation abruptly.

"How did you like the Smiths?"

"Oh, pretty well."

"I should have thought you would have got on tremendously well together."



## “TO A PRETTY SAINT”

“Oh, I don’t know. I think I like people to be one thing or the other, and the Smiths are half-way housers.”

“You’re very ungrateful.”

“Oh, they only asked us as a demonstration,” said Dale, who had some acuteness.

Janet laughed, but her companion was moodily prodding the ground with his stick as he walked along.

They reached a cottage where she had a visit to pay, and she bade him good-bye.

“Then you won’t have the verses?”

“I think not.”

“Very well, then, here goes;” and he took the paper out of his pocket and tore it to bits. The fragments fluttered to the ground.

“How foolish!” she said. “I daresay they were worth a lot of money—but then you can write them out again.”

“Do you think I shall?” he asked, grinding the fragments into the mud.

“I’m afraid you will do nothing wise,” she said, giving him her hand. Yet the extravagance rather pleased her.

Until Dale reached his own house, it did not strike him that he had lost his bet. Philip quickly reminded him, and laughed mercilessly when a crumpled five-pound note was thrown at his head by his angry friend.

“I tell you she wanted to keep them,” said Dale unjustifiably.

“Then why didn’t she?” asked Nellie.

“Mrs. Delane didn’t approve of it.”

“I expect Mrs. Delane doesn’t approve of you at all,” remarked Philip.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"No, nor of my friends either," answered Dale, flinging himself into a chair.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Hodge, who sat by, "her opinion will neither make us nor mar us."

"How have we had the misfortune to offend the lady?" inquired Philip. "She has never seen us."

"Here's your tea, Dale," said Nellie. "Are you tired?"

"Yes, a little. Thanks, Nellie."

"Was she looking nice, Dale?"

"I didn't see her."

"I mean Miss Delane."

"Oh yes, I suppose so. I didn't look much."



## CHAPTER VIII

### AN INDISCREET DISCIPLE

SUMMER wore away, and autumn came in brief, calm radiance, and passed : winter began to threaten. At Denborough, one quiet day followed another, each one noticeable for little, but in the aggregate producing some not unimportant changes at Little-hill. Dale Bannister had begun to work hard and to work in solitude ; the inspiration of Nellie's eyes seemed either unnecessary or ineffectual. Moreover, his leisure hours were now largely spent in visiting at houses in the neighbourhood. He did not neglect his guests, but, whenever their engagements occupied them, instead of wandering about alone or enjoying the humours of the High Street, as he had been prone to do in the early days of his sojourn, he would go over to Mount Pleasant, or to the Grange, or to Sir Harry Fulmer's, and he was becoming learned in country lore and less scornful of country ways. The Doctor was a rare visitor now, and, when he came, it generally fell to Philip Hume's lot to entertain him. Philip did his duty loyally, but it was dreary work, for Roberts' conversation, at their meetings, consisted, in the main, of diatribes against Dale Bannister. He would declare that Dale's conduct, in maintaining friendly relations with the gentry of the neighbourhood, was in flagrant contradiction to the views he had proclaimed in his writings. Philip shrugged his shoulders, and said that some men were better than



## A CHANGE OF AIR

their writings, some worse, but no man the same as his writings; the pose must ever be allowed for: and at this, the angry man often turned his back on the house with an imprecation on half-heartedness. For the rest, Philip's hands were not very full, and he and Nellie Fane found time for long expeditions together, which would have been more cheerful, had it not been for Nellie's scrupulous determination to ignore the absence of the third member of the old trio. One day Philip's idle steps led him through the town on the search for matter of amusement. He was caught in a shower, and took refuge in the Mayor's shop, knowing that his Worship always had time for a gossip. He was not disappointed. The Mayor entertained him with a graphic account of the last assault on Mr. Delane's position as member for the Denborough division, and of his own recent re-election to his high office. Philip congratulated him on the latter event, and asked in curiosity,

"And what are your politics, Mr. Mayor?"

"I hold as a man in my position should have no politics, not party politics, Mr. Hume, sir."

"Well, there's something to be said for that."

"After all, we know what they are, sir. One out and the other in—that's what they are, sir."

"But you said Mrs. Hedger canvassed for the Squire."

"So she did, sir. Now, my daughter is on the Liberal side; she and Miss Smith used to go a-drivin' round together."

"A sad division of opinion, Mr. Mayor."

"Well, we can differ without disagreein', sir. Besides," he added, with something like a wink, "customers differ too."



## AN INDISCREET DISCIPLE

"Most true."

"Business is business, sir, especially with a grow-in' fam'ly. I always think of my fam'ly, Mr. Hume, and how I should leave 'em if I was took—taken."

"A man's first duty, Mr. Mayor."

"You wouldn't catch me goin' on like this young Roberts."

"Why, what's he been up to now?" asked Philip uneasily.

"You ain't seen the *Standard*, sir?" The Mayor, of course, meant the *East Denshire Standard*, not the London paper of the same name.

"No."

"Well, last week they printed the Vicar's sermon on 'The Work of Christianity in the World.' A fine sermon it was, sir. I heard it, being a Church of England man. Mrs. Hedger goes to Chapel."

"'Customers differ too,'" thought Philip, smiling.

"Well, as I was sayin', Jones of the *Standard* got the Vicar to give it 'im, and it came out, with a leadin' article of Jones's crackin' it up."

"But how does the Doctor——"

"This week, sir," continued the Mayor, shaking an impressive forefinger, "in the *Chronicle*—that's the Liberal paper, sir—there's a letter from the Doctor—two columns—just abusin' the Church and the parsons, and the 'ole—whole thing, fit to—well, I never did!"

"Hum! Rather rash, isn't it?"

"Rash, Mr. Hume, sir? It's madness, that's what it is, sir. He talks about 'pestilent priests,' and I don't know what all, sir, and ends with quot-in' thirty or forty lines from a poem called, I think,



## A CHANGE OF AIR

*The Arch Apostates*,—would that be it, sir?—by Mr. Bannister.”

“No! does he, by Jove?” said Philip, slapping his thigh.

“And the po’try, sir, is worse than the Doctor’s own stuff, sir, beggin’ your pardon as a friend of Mr. Bannister.”

“I know the lines. They’re some of the hottest he’s ever done.”

“Mr. Bannister, of course, can afford it, sir. His opinions are what he pleases—but the Doctor, sir!”

“So the fat’s in the fire?”

“Just the very worst time it could ha’ come out, sir. The Guardians over at Dirkham meet to-morrow to elect their medical officer. I’m afraid as they won’t re-elect Dr. Roberts, sir, and there was more than one down at the ‘Delane Arms’ sayin’ they’d had the last to do with him.”

Philip parted from his informant in much concern for Roberts, and in no small amusement at the public placarding of *The Arch Apostates*. *Sur-tout, point de zele*, he could imagine Dale saying to his infatuated disciple.

On returning home, however, he found the poet saying much harder things of, if not to, Mr. Roberts. Dale had been calling at the Smiths’. The Colonel, while shaking his head over Roberts’ imprudence, had applauded his opinions, and was, above all, enchanted with the extract from Dale’s poem, which he had never hitherto read. His pleasure was, as he told Dale, greatly increased by finding that the letter and the quotation had fallen like a bombshell on the Grange household.

“The Squire was furious. Mrs. Delane said



## AN INDISCREET DISCIPLE

she had no idea you had done anything so bad as that ; and little Janet sat and looked as if some one had knocked down the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was splendid ! Gad, sir, you've waked 'em up."

These congratulations had the effect of reducing the poet almost to a frenzy. "What business," he demanded, "has the fellow to quote me in support of his balderdash without my leave ?"

"My dear fellow, your works are the possession of the nation," said Philip, smiling, as he lit a cigar.

"It's an infernal liberty!" fumed Dale.

"You light the fire, and blame it for blazing," said Philip.

"One doesn't want to shove one's views down people's throats."

"Doesn't one ? One used to."

"I shall write and disclaim any responsibility."

"For the poem ?"

"For its publication, of course."

"That won't do you much good."

The Mayor's forecast, based on a lifelong observation of his neighbours, proved only too correct. Dr. Spink entered the lists against Roberts, and was elected by every vote save one. Sir Harry Fulmer, in blind and devoted obedience to Tora Smith, voted for Roberts : the rest, headed by the Squire, installed his rival in his place ; and the Squire, having sternly done his duty, sat down and wrote a long and friendly letter of remonstrance and explanation to his erring friend.

As misfortune followed misfortune, the Doctor set his teeth, and dared fate to do her worst. He waited a few days, hoping to be comforted by a word of approval from his master ; none came. At last he determined to seek out Dale Bannister,



## A CHANGE OF AIR

and was about to start, when his wife came in and gave him the new issue of the *Chronicle*. Ethel Roberts was pale and weary-looking, and she glanced anxiously at her husband.

"I am going up to Littlehill," he said.

"Have you done your round, dear?"

"My round doesn't take long now-a-days. Maggs will give me fifteen pounds for the pony: you know we don't want him now."

"No, Jim, and we do want fifteen pounds."

"What's that?"

"The *Chronicle*, dear. There's—a letter from Mr. Bannister."

"Is there? Good! Let's see what Bannister has to say to these bigoted idiots."

He opened the paper, and in the middle of the front page read:—

"A DISCLAIMER FROM MR. BANNISTER.

"SIR,—I desire to state that the use made by Mr. James Roberts of my poem in your last issue was without my authority or approbation. The poem was written some years ago, and must not be assumed to represent my present view on the subject of which it treats.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

"DALE BANNISTER."

The Doctor stared at the letter.

"Bannister—Dale Bannister wrote that!" and he flung the paper angrily on the floor. "Give me my hat."

"You're not going—?"

"Yes, I am, Ethel. I'm going to find out what this means."



## AN INDISCREET DISCIPLE

"Hadn't you better wait till you're less——"

"Less what, Ethel? What do you mean?"

"Till the rain stops, Jim dear; and it's just baby's time for coming down."

"Hang—no, I beg your pardon, Ethel. I'm very sorry, but I must see the end of this."

He rushed out, and the baby found a dull, pre-occupied, almost tearful, very unamusing mother to play with that day.

The Doctor marched into Dale's room with a stern look on his face.

"Well, Roberts, how are you?" asked Dale, not graciously.

"What does this mean, Bannister?"

"It means, my dear fellow, that you took my name in vain, and I had to say so."

"I'm not thinking of myself, though it would have been more friendly to write to me first."

"Well, I was riled, and didn't think of that."

"But do you mean to deny your own words?"

"Really, Roberts, you seem to forget that I don't enjoy setting the place by the ears, although you seem to."

"You wrote that poem?"

"Of course I wrote the damned thing," said Dale peevishly.

"And now—Bannister, you're not going to—to throw us over?"

"Nonsense! I like to publish my views at my own time and place, that's all."

"A man like you belongs to his followers as much as to himself."

"More, it seems."

The Doctor looked at him almost scornfully. Dale did not like scorn from any one.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"I was particularly anxious," he began apologetically, "not to get into a shindy here. I wanted to drop politics and so on, and be friendly——"

"Do you know what you're saying, or the meanness of it?"

"Meanness? What do you mean?"

"You know very well. All I want to know is if you wrote this thing?"

"Of course I wrote it."

"And you stand to it?"

"Yes. I think you ought to have asked me before you did it."

"The Squire is shocked, eh?" asked the Doctor with a sneer.

"The Squire's views are nothing to me," answered Dale, flushing very red.

The Doctor laughed bitterly.

"Come, come, old fellow," said Dale, "don't let us quarrel."

"Quarrel? Well, we won't. Only look here, Bannister."

"Well?"

"If you throw us over now, you'll be——"

"There, don't abuse me any more."

"Oh, I wasn't going to abuse you. If you leave us,—you, the leader we trusted,—where are we, where are we?"

"Give me another chance," said Dale, holding out his hand.

"You won't withdraw this?"

"How the deuce can I now?"

The Doctor shook his hand, saying,

"Don't betray us, don't betray us;" and thus the very uncomfortable interview came to a desired end.



## AN INDISCREET DISCIPLE

That night at dinner Dale was cross and in low spirits. His friends, perceiving it, forbore to express their views as to his last public utterance, and the repast dragged its weary length along amid intermittent conversation.

When the dessert was on the table, a note was brought for Dale. It was from the Squire.

“DEAR BANNISTER,—I was very glad to see your letter in the *Chronicle*. Mrs. Delane joins me in hoping you will dine with us to-morrow *en famille*. Excuse short notice. The man waits for an answer—don’t write one.—Yours truly,

“GEORGE DELANE.”

“Say I’ll come with great pleasure,” said Dale, his face growing brighter.

“Where will he go with great pleasure?” asked Philip of Nellie Fane.

“Where is it, Dale?”

“Oh, only the Grange, to dinner to-morrow. I think I had better write a note, though—don’t you think so, Phil? More—more attentive, you know.”

“Write, my son,” answered Philip, and, as Dale left the room, he looked round with a smile and exclaimed, “One!”

“One what, my dear?” asked Mrs. Hodge.

“Piece of silver, ma’am,” replied Philip.

“You’re sneering again,” said Nellie in a warning tone. “Why shouldn’t he like to dine at the Grange?” and she looked marvellously reasonable and indifferent.

“I was speaking with the voice of Dr. Roberts, Nellie, that’s all. For my own part, I think a dinner is one of those things one may accept even from the enemy.”



## CHAPTER IX

### DALE'S OWN OPINION

IF ever our own fortune would allow us to be perfectly happy, the consummation is prevented and spoilt by the obstinately intruding unhappiness of others. The reverend person who was of opinion that the bliss of the blessed would be increased and, so to say, vivified by the sight of the tortures of the damned, finds few supporters now-a-days, perhaps because our tenderer feelings shrink from such a ruthless application of the doctrine that only by contemplating the worse can we enjoy the better; perhaps also because we are not so sure as he was that we should not be the onlooked rather than the onlookers if ever his picture came to be realised. So sensitive are we to the ills that others suffer, that at times we feel almost a grudge against them for their persistence—however unwilling it be—in marring our perfect contentment; surely they could let us forget them for once in a way.

This last was Dale Bannister's frame of mind, as he lay, idly and yet not peacefully, on his sofa next morning. This Doctor, with his unflinching logic and unrestrained zeal, was a nuisance. His devotion had not been sought, and certainly, if it entailed scenes like yesterday's, was not desired. Dale never asked him to ruin his practice, as Philip Hume said he was doing, in order to uphold Dale's principles; Dale did not want a starving family to his account, whose hungry looks should



## DALE'S OWN OPINION

press him to a close questioning of his conscience. Any man with an ounce of common sense would understand that there was a time for everything, and a place. It was one thing to publish your views in a book, addressed to the world of thinkers and intelligent readers; it was quite another to brandish them in the face of your neighbours, and explode them, like shells, in the innocent streets of Denborough. And yet, because he recognised this obvious distinction, because he had some sense of what was suitable and reasonable, and because he refused to make enemies of people simply because they were well-off, the Doctor stormed at him as if he were a traitor and a snob. And Philip Hume had taken to smiling in an aggravating way when the Grange was mentioned; and even Nellie—but Dale, alert as he was in his present mood to discover matter of complaint, found none against Nellie, unless it might be some falling off in her old cheerfulness and buoyancy.

Dale lit his pipe and set himself to consider with impartiality whether Roberts had in fact any grievance against him. He wanted to satisfy himself that there was no basis for the Doctor's indignation; his self-esteem demanded that the accusation should be disproved. But really it was too plain. What had he done? Refused to acquiesce in being made a fool of, refused to meet civility with incivility, to play the churl, to shut his eyes to intelligence and culture and attractiveness, because they happened to be found among people who did not think as he did or as Roberts was pleased to think. He knew what those sneers meant, but he would go his own way. Things had come to a pretty pass if a man might not be civil and seek to



## A CHANGE OF AIR

avoid wholly unnecessary causes of offence without being treated as a renegade to all his convictions. That was not his idea of breadth of mind or toleration, or of good feeling either. It was simple bigotry, as narrow as—ay, narrower than—anything he at least had found on the other side.

Dale disposed of this question, but he still lay on the sofa and thought. It had been a gain to him, he said to himself, to see this new side of life; the expedition to Littlehill was well justified. It is good for a man to take a flag of truce and go talk with the enemy in the gate. He may not change his own views,—Dale was conscious of no change in his,—but he comes to see how other people may hold different ones, and the reason, or anyhow the naturalness, of theirs. A man of Roberts' fierce Puritan temper could not feel nor appreciate what appealed to him so strongly in such a life as they lived, for instance, at the Grange. It had a beauty so its own, that unquestioned superiority, not grasped as a prize or valued as an opportunity, but gravely accepted as the parent of duties—the unbroken family life, grasping through many hands the torch undimmed from reverend antiquity—the very house, which seemed to enshrine honourable traditions, at which he could not bring himself to sneer. The sweetness of it all broke back baffled from the wall of the Doctor's stern conviction and iron determination. Yet how sweet it all was! And these people welcomed into their circle any man who had a claim to welcome; freely, ungrudgingly, cordially. All they asked was a little gentleness to their—he supposed they were prejudices—a little deference to their prepossessions, a little smoothing off of the



## DALE'S OWN OPINION

rougher edges of difference. It was not much to ask. Was he churlishly to deny the small concession, to refuse to meet them any part of the way, to entrench himself in the dogmatic intolerance of his most vehement utterances, to shut his mind off from this new source of inspiration? That was what Roberts wanted. Well, then—Roberts be hanged!

The course of these reflections produced in Dale a return to his usual equanimity. It was plainly impossible to please everybody. He must act as seemed right to himself, neglecting the frowns of unreasonable grumblers. No doubt Roberts was devoted to him, and Arthur Angell too. Yet Roberts abused him, and Arthur bothered him with imploring letters, which warned him against the subtle temptations of his new life. It was a curious sort of devotion which showed itself mainly in criticism and disapproval; it was very flattering of these good friends to set him on a pedestal and require him to live up to the position; only, unfortunately, the pedestal was of their choosing, not his. All he asked was to be allowed to live a quiet life and work out his own ideas in his own way. If they could not put up with that, why—Dale refilled his pipe and opened a story by Maupassant.

It may be asserted that every man is the victim of a particular sort of follies, the follies engendered by his particular sort of surroundings; they make a fool's circle within which each of us has a foot planted: for the rest, we may be, and no doubt generally are, very sensible people. If we set aside Squire Delane's special and indigenous illusions, he was very far indeed from a fool, and after dinner that evening he treated his distinguished guest with



## A CHANGE OF AIR

no small tact. The young man was beyond question a force ; was it outside of ingenuity to turn him in a better direction ?

“ Everybody approves of your letter,” he said. “ Roberts had no business to drag your name in.”

“ Of course one is exposed to that sort of thing.”

“ It’s a penalty of greatness. But the case is peculiar when you’re actually living in the place.”

“ That’s exactly what I feel. It’s making me a party in a local quarrel.”

“ That’s what he wanted to do; he wanted to fight under your shield.”

“ I didn’t come here to fight at all.”

“ I should think not; and you haven’t found us thirsting for battle, have you ? ”

“ I have found a kinder welcome than I had any right to expect.”

“ My dear fellow ! Much as we differ, we’re all proud of counting you as a Denshire man. And I don’t suppose we shall quarrel much about Denshire affairs. Oh, I know you think the whole system of country life an iniquity. I don’t go so deep myself. I say, there it is : perhaps it might be changed, but, pending that, sensible men can work together to make the best of it. At any rate, they can avoid treading on one another’s corns.”

“ I want to avoid everybody’s corns—if they’ll avoid mine.”

“ Well, we’ll try. I daresay we shall pull together. At any rate, it’s very pleasant dining together. Shall we go up-stairs and ask Janet for a song ? ”

Mrs. Delane had evidently caught her cue from her husband, and she treated Dale not as a sinner who repenteth,—a mode of reception which, after



## DALE'S OWN OPINION

all, requires great tact to make it acceptable,—but as one who had never been a sinner at all. She asked Dale if he had been overwhelmed by callers. He replied that he had not suffered much in that way.

“I knew it,” she said. “You have frightened them, Mr. Bannister; they think you came in search of studious retirement.”

“Oh, I hate both study and retirement, Mrs. Delane.”

“Well, I shall tell people that—may I? Now, when I was at the Cransfords’ yesterday,—he’s our Lord-Lieutenant, you know,—they were wondering whether they might call.”

“I am delighted to see any one.”

“From the Mayor upwards—or, I suppose, Hedger would think I ought to say downwards. We heard what fun you made of the poor man.”

“Mr. Bannister will be more respectful to the Lord-Lieutenant,” said Janet, smiling.

“I suppose I disapprove of Lord-Lieutenants,” remarked Dale, with a laugh.

“You’ll like Lady Cransford very much, and she’ll like you. She gives so many balls, that a bachelor household is a godsend.”

“Bannister hardly depends on that for a welcome, my dear,” said the Squire from the hearth-rug.

“Now I declare, meeting him just as a friend like this, I’m always forgetting that he’s a famous man.”

“Please go on, Mrs. Delane. It’s a capital exchange. But when are you going to give me the pleasure of seeing you at Littlehill?”

Mrs. Delane paused for just a second.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“I should like to visit your hermit’s cell. But I’m so busy just now, and I daresay you are. When your guests forsake you, perhaps we will come and relieve your solitude. Janet, will you give us some music?”

Dale followed Janet to the piano, with a little frown on his brow. Why wouldn’t she come now? Was it—? Janet’s voice dispersed the frown and the reflection.

She sang a couple of songs, choosing them out of a book. As she turned over the leaves, Dale saw that some of the airs were set to words of his own writing. When Janet came to one of these, she turned the leaf hastily. The Squire had gone out, and Mrs. Delane, with the privilege of near relationship, was absorbed in a novel.

“Will you do me a great favour?” he said.

“What, Mr. Bannister?”

“I should like to hear you sing words of mine. See, here are two or three.”

She glanced through them; then she shut the book and made as though to rise.

“You won’t do it?”

Janet blushed and looked troubled.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Bannister; but I can’t sing those words. I—I don’t like them.”

“I am sorry they are so bad,” he answered in an offended tone.

“Oh, of course, so far as power and—and beauty goes, everything in the book is trash compared to them. But I can’t sing them.”

“I won’t press you.”

“I know you are angry. Please don’t be angry, Mr. Bannister. I can’t do what I think wrong, can I?”



## DALE'S OWN OPINION

"Oh, I have no right to be angry."

"There, you wouldn't say that unless you were angry. People never do."

"You have such a wretchedly bad opinion of me, Miss Delane."

"Do you mind that?"

"You know I do."

"Then one would think you would try to change it."

"Ah, how can I?"

"Write something I should delight in singing."

"If I do, may I dedicate it to you?"

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be allowed."

"But if it were allowed, would you allow it?"

"You know how proud any girl would be of it—of course you know."

"You don't do justice to my humility."

"Do justice to yourself first, Mr. Bannister."

"What sort of songs do you like?"

"Oh, anything honest, and manly, and patriotic, and—and nice in feeling."

"A catholic taste—and yet none of mine satisfy it."

"I will not be quarrelled with," declared Janet.

"My only wish is to propitiate you."

"Then you know now how to do it."

It must be allowed that conversations of this nature have a pleasantness of their own, and Dale left the Grange with a delightful feeling of having been treated as he ought to be treated. He found Philip Hume writing and smoking in the study.

"Well, been stroked the right way, old man?" asked Philip, throwing down his pen.

Dale helped himself to whisky and soda-water, without replying.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"I've been having a talk with Nellie," pursued Philip.

"What's wrong with Nellie?"

"She's got some notion in her head that she and her mother ought to go."

Dale was lighting a cigar.

"Of course I told her it was all nonsense, and that you meant them to stay as long as they liked. She's got some maggot in her head about propriety—all nonsense, when her mother's here."

"I don't want them to go, if they like staying," said Dale.

"Well, we should be slow without Nellie, shouldn't we? You must blow her up for thinking of it. She only wants to be persuaded."

"She can do as she likes."

"You don't seem very enthusiastic about it one way or the other."

"Well, my dear Phil, I can't be expected to cry at the idea of little Nellie Fane leaving us."

"Yet you made rather a point of her coming—but that was two months ago."

"Really, you might leave Nellie and me to settle it."

"What I told her was right, I suppose?"

"Well, you don't suppose I wanted you to tell her to pack up?"

"I don't know what you want, old man," said Philip; "and I doubt if you do."



## CHAPTER X

### A PREJUDICED VERDICT

IT has been contumeliously said by insolent Englishmen—a part of our population which may sometimes seem to foreign eyes as large as the whole—that you might put any other of the world's capitals, say Paris or New York, down in London, and your cabman would not be able to find it. However this may be,—and there is no need in this place either for assertions or admissions,—it is certain that you might unload a wagonful of talents in Piccadilly, and they would speedily be absorbed and leave little obvious trace of the new ingredient. Hence the advantage, for a man who does not dislike the *digito monstrari et dicier* “*hic est*,” of dwelling in small places, and hence, a cynic might suggest, the craving for quieter quarters displayed by some of our less conspicuous celebrities. It is better, says a certain authority, to reign in hell than serve in heaven; and a man may grow weary of walking unrecognised down the Strand, when he has only, to be the beheld of all beholders, to take up his residence in—perhaps it will be more prudent to say Market Denborough, and not point the finger of printed scorn at any better-known resort.

This very ungenerous explanation was the one which Miss Victoria Smith chose to adopt as accounting for Dale Bannister's coming to Littlehill. Such an idea had never crossed her mind at first,



## A CHANGE OF AIR

but it became evident that a man who could leave his friend in the lurch and palter with his principles, as Dale's letter to the *Chronicle* showed him to be doing, could only be credited with any discoverable motive less bad and contemptible than the worst through mere hastiness and ill-considered good-nature. For her part, she liked a man to stick to his colours and to his friends, and not be ashamed before the tea-tables of Denshire. No, she had never read his poems, she had no time, but papa had, and agreed with every word of them.

"Gad! does he?" said Sir Harry Fulmer, to whom these views were expressed. "Well played the Colonel!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, some of them made me sit up rather," remarked Sir Harry.

"Oh, anything would make you 'sit up,' as you call it. I don't consider you a Radical."

"I voted for your friend the Doctor anyhow."

"Yes, that was good of you. You were the only one with an elementary sense of justice."

Sir Harry's sense of justice, elementary or other, had had very little to do with his vote, but he said with honest pride,

"Somebody ought to stand by a fellow when he's down."

"Especially when he's in the right."

"Well, I don't quite see, Miss Smith, what business it was of Roberts' to cut up the Vicar's sermon. Naturally the Vicar don't like it."

"So he takes his medicine from Dr. Spink!"

"Rather awkward for him to have Roberts about the place."

"Oh, of course you defend him."



## A PREJUDICED VERDICT

"The Vicar's a very good fellow, though he's a Tory."

"You seem to think all Tories good fellows."

"So they are, most of them."

"I suppose you think Mr. Bannister's right too?"

"I shouldn't be so down on him as you are."

"You like people who lead their friends on and then forsake them?"

"Bannister never asked him to write the letter."

"Well, it's not my idea of friendship. I wouldn't have a friend who thought that conduct right."

"Then I think it deuced wrong," said Sir Harry promptly.

"It's no compliment to a woman to treat her like a baby," remarked Tora, with dignity.

Sir Harry perceived that it would be to his advantage to change the subject.

"Are you going skating?" he asked. "There's nothing else to do in this beastly frost."

"Does the ice bear?"

"Yes, they're skating on the Grange lake. I met Hume, Bannister's friend, and he told me Bannister was there."

"Wasn't he going? I rather like him."

"No, he was walking with Miss Fane. I believe I rather put my foot in it by asking her if she wasn't going."

"Why shouldn't you?"

"She said she didn't know Mrs. Delane, and looked confused, don't you know?"

"Hasn't Mrs. Delane called?"

"It seems not," said Sir Harry.

"I wonder how long they are going to stay at Littlehill?"



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“For ever, apparently. Shall you come to the lake?”

“Perhaps in the afternoon.”

Tora returned to the house, still wondering. She was very angry with Dale, and prepared to think no good of him. Was it possible that she and the Colonel had been hasty in stretching out the hand of welcome to Mrs. Hodge and her daughter? For all her independence, Tora liked to have Mrs. Delane's *imprimatur* on the women of her acquaintance. She thought she would have a word with the Colonel, and went to seek him in his study. He was not there, but it chanced that there lay on the table a copy of Dale's first published volume, *The Clarion*. Three-quarters of the little book were occupied with verses on matters of a more or less public description,—beliefs past and future, revolutions effected and prayed for, and so forth: the leaves bore marks of use, and evidently were often turned by the Colonel. But bound up with them was a little sheaf of verses of an amatory character: where these began, the Colonel's interest appeared to cease, for the pages were uncut; he had only got as far as the title. It was not so with his daughter. Having an idle hour and some interest in the matters and affairs of love, she took a paper-knife and sat down to read. Poets are, by ancient privilege, *legibus soluti*, and Dale certainly revelled in his freedom. Still, perhaps, the verses were not in reality so very, very atrocious as they unhappily appeared to the young lady who now read them. Tora was accustomed to consider herself almost a revolutionary spirit, and her neighbours, half in earnest, half in joke, encouraged the idea; but her revolutions were to be very strictly



## A PREJUDICED VERDICT

confined, and the limits of her free-thought were marked out by most unyielding metes and bounds—bounds that stopped very short at the church door and on the domestic threshold. This frame of mind is too common to excite comment, and it had been intensified in her by the social surroundings against which she was in mock revolt. Dale's freedom knew no trammels, or had known none when he wrote *The Clarion*—nothing was sacred to him except truth, everything as nothing beside reason, reason the handmaid of passion, wherein the spirit and individuality of each man found its rightful expression. This theory, embodied in a poet's fancy and enlivened by a young man's ardour, made fine verses, but verses which startled Tora Smith. She read for half an hour, and then, flinging the book down and drawing a long breath, exclaimed, "I can believe anything of him now!"

And she had had this man to dinner! And that girl! Who was that girl?

The Colonel came home to luncheon in very good spirits. He had just succeeded, in the interests of freedom, in stirring up a spirit of active revolt in Alderman Johnstone. The Alderman had hitherto, like his father before him, occupied his extensive premises on a weekly tenancy; he had never been threatened with molestation or eviction; but he felt that he existed on sufferance, and the consciousness of his precarious position had been irksome to him. A moment had come when the demand for houses was slack, when two or three were empty, and when the building trade itself was nearly at a standstill. The Colonel had incited Johnstone to seize the opportunity to ask from the Squire a lease, and Johnstone had promised to take



## A CHANGE OF AIR

nothing less than 'seven, fourteen, or twenty-one.' If refused, he declared he would surrender the premises and build for himself on some land of the Colonel's just outside the town.

"Delane must grant it," said the Colonel, rubbing his hands, "and then we shall have one house anyhow where our bills can be put up. Bannister will be delighted. By the way, Tora, he wants us to go in to tea to-day, after skating. I suppose you're going to skate?"

"I am going to skate, but I am not going to Mr. Bannister's," said Tora coldly.

"Why not?"

The Colonel was told why not with explicitness and vehemence. He tugged his white whisker in some perplexity: he did not mind much about the poems, though, of course, no excess of scrupulousness could be too great in a girl like Tora; but if she were right about the other affair! That must be looked into.

The Colonel was one of those people who pride themselves on tact and *savoir faire*; he aggravated this fault by believing that tact and candour could be combined in a happy union, and he determined to try the effect of the mixture on Dale Bannister. It would go hard if he did not destroy this mare's nest of Tora's.

All the neighbourhood was skating on the Grange lake under a winter sun, whose ruddy rays tinged the naked trees, and drew an answering glitter from the diamond-paned windows of the house. The reeds were motionless, and the graze of skates on the ice sounded sharp in the still air, and struck the ear through the swishing of birch brooms and the shuffle of sweepers' feet. From



## A PREJUDICED VERDICT

time to time a sudden thud and a peal of laughter following told of disaster, or there grated across the lake a chair, carrying one who preferred the conquest of men to the science of equilibrium. Rosy cheeks glowed, nimble feet sped, and lissom figures swayed to and fro as they glided over the shining surface, till even the old and the stout, the cripples and the fox-hunters, felt the glow of life tingling in their veins, and the beauty of the world feeding their spirits with fresh desire. "It is not all of life to live," but, at such a moment, it is the best part of it.

Dale Bannister was enjoying himself; he was a good skater, and it gave him pleasure that, when people turned to look at the famous poet, they should see an athletic youth: only he wished that Janet Delane would give him an opportunity of offering his escort, and not appear so contented with the company of a tall man of military bearing, who had come down to the water with the Grange party. He was told that the new-comer was Captain Ripley, Lord Cransford's eldest son, and he did not escape without witnessing some of the nods and becks which, in the country, where everybody knows everybody, accompany the most incipient stages of a supposed love-affair. Feeling, under these circumstances, a little desolate, for Philip was engrossed in figures and would not waste his time talking, he saw with pleasure Tora Smith and Sir Harry coming towards him. He went to meet them, and, at a distance of a few yards from them, slackened his pace and lifted his hat, not doubting of friendly recognition. Sir Harry returned his salute with a cheery "How are you?" but did not stop, for Tora swept on past Dale Bannister, without a glance at him. In surprise, he paused. "She



## A CHANGE OF AIR

must have seen me," he thought, "but why in the world—?" Bent on being sure, he put himself right in her path, as she completed the circle and met him again. There was no mistaking her intention: she gave him the cut direct, as clearly and as resolutely as ever it was given.

Sir Harry had remonstrated in vain. In Tora's uncompromising mind, impulse did not wait on counsel, and her peremptory "I have my reasons" refused all information and prevented all persuasion. He felt he had done enough for friendship when he braved her disapproval by declining to follow her example. He did not pretend to understand the ways of woman, and Dale Bannister might fight his own battles.

While Dale was yet standing in angry bewilderment,—for who had received him with more cordiality than she who now openly insulted him?—he saw the Colonel hobbling towards him across the slippery expanse. The Colonel fell once, and Dale heard him swear testily at the sweeper who helped him to rise. He thought it kind to meet him half way: perhaps the Colonel would explain. The Colonel was most ready to do so; in fact, he had come for the very purpose of warning Bannister that some silly idea was afloat, which it only needed a word to scatter.

"Is there?" said Dale. "Possibly that is why Miss Smith failed to see me twice just now?"

"Your poems have shocked her, my boy," said the Colonel, with a knowing look—the look that represented tact and *savoir faire*.

"Is that all? She takes rather severe measures, doesn't she?"

"Well," answered the Colonel, with the smile



## A PREJUDICED VERDICT

which brought candour into play, "that isn't quite all."

"What in the world else is there?"

"You know how censorious people are, and how a girl takes alarm at the very idea of anything—you know?"

Dale chafed at these diplomatic approaches.

"If there's anything said against me, pray let me know."

"Oh, it's nothing very definite," said the Colonel uneasily. He did not find what he had to say so simple as it had seemed.

"Indefinite things are most hopeless."

"Yes, yes, quite so. Well, if you really wish it—if you won't be offended—No doubt it's all a mistake."

"What do they say?"

"Well, we're men of the world, Bannister. The fact is, people don't quite understand your—your household."

"My household? It consists of myself alone and the servants."

"Of course, my dear fellow, of course! I knew it was so, but I am glad to be able to say so on your own authority."

The aim of speech is, after all, only to convey ideas: the Colonel had managed, however clumsily, to convey his idea. Dale frowned, and pretended to laugh.

"How absurd!" he said. "I should resent it if it were not too absurd."

"I'm sure, Bannister, you'll acquit me of any meddling."

"Oh yes. I'm sorry my guests have given rise, however innocently, to such talk."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"It's most unfortunate. I'm sure nothing more is needed. I hope the ladies are well?"

"Yes, thanks."

"I don't see them here."

"No, they're not here," answered Dale, frowning again.

"I hope we shall see some more of them?"

"You're very kind. I—I don't suppose they—will be staying much longer."

As Dale made his way to the bank to take off his skates, Janet and Tora passed him together. Tora kept her eyes rigidly fixed on the chimneys of the Grange. He made no sign of expecting recognition, but Janet, as she drew near, looked at him, blushing red, and bowed and smiled.

"That girl's a trump," said Dale Bannister. "She sticks to her friends."



## CHAPTER XI

### A FABLE ABOUT BIRDS

MRS. HODGE and Nellie, being left to their own resources, had employed the afternoon in paying a visit to Ethel Roberts, and nothing was wanting to fill Dale's cup of vexation to overflowing, unless it were to have Nellie flying open-mouthed at him, as he grumblingly expressed it, with a tale of the distress in the Doctor's household. Ethel Roberts had the fortitude to bear her troubles, the added fortitude to bear them cheerfully, but not the supreme fortitude which refuses to tell a tale of woe to any ear, however sympathetic. She did not volunteer information, but she did allow it to be dragged out of her, and the barriers of her reserve broke down before Mrs. Hodge's homely consolations and Nellie's sorrowful horror. They were reduced, she admitted, in effect to living on little else than her own wretched income; the practice brought in hardly more than it took out, for, while the rich patients failed, the poor remained; the rent was overdue, bills were unpaid, and the butcher, the milkman, and the coal-merchant were growing sulky.

"And while," said Mrs. Hodge, "that poor young creature is pinching, and starving, and crying, the man's thinking of nothing but Nihilists and what not. I'd Nihilist him!"

Dinner was served to Dale with sauce of this sort.

"Can I prevent fools suffering for their folly?" he asked.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"The baby looks so ill," said Nellie, "and Mrs. Roberts is worn to a shadow."

"Did you see Roberts?" asked Philip.

"For a minute," said Nellie, "but he was very cold and disagreeable."

"Thought you were tarred with the same brush as Dale, I suppose?"

"Can't you do anything for 'em, Dale?" asked Mrs. Hodge.

"I can send him a cheque."

"He'll send it back," remarked Philip.

"I wish he'd get out of the place."

"Yes, he might as well be miserable somewhere else, mightn't he?"

Dale glared at his friend, and relapsed into silence. Nevertheless, in spite of Philip's prediction, he sat down after dinner and wrote to Roberts, saying that he had heard that he was in temporary embarrassment, and urging him to allow Dale to be his banker for the moment; this would, Dale added, be the best way of showing that he bore no malice for Dale's letter. He sent a man with the note, ordering him to wait for an answer.

The answer was not long in coming; the man was back in half an hour, bringing the Doctor's reply:—

"Three months ago, I should have thought it an honour to share my last crust with you, and no shame to ask half of all you had. Now I will not touch a farthing of your money, until you come back to us. If your friends pay my wife further visits, I shall be obliged if they will look somewhat less keenly at my household arrangements.

"JAMES ROBERTS."



## A FABLE ABOUT BIRDS

"There is the snub you have brought on me!" exclaimed Dale angrily, flinging the letter to Nellie. "I might have known better than to listen to your stories."

"Dale, Dale, it was every word true. How selfish he is not to think of his wife!"

"Many people are selfish."

"Is anything the matter, Dale?"

"Oh, I'm infernally worried. I never get any peace."

"Hadn't you a good time skating?"

"No. I'm beginning to hate this place."

"Oh, Dale! I've enjoyed my visit so much."

"Very glad to hear it, I'm sure."

"You must have seen it; we've stayed so long. I've often told mamma we ought to be going."

Dale lit a cigarette.

"Indeed we have had no mercy on you, Dale; but the country and the rest are so delightful."

"Hum—in some ways."

"But I must be back at work. Mamma thought next Saturday would do."

"As soon as that?" said Dale, with polite surprise.

"Think how long we have been here."

"Oh, don't go on Saturday!"

Nellie's face brightened.

"Don't you want us to?" she asked, with an eager little smile. Dale was going to be kind after all.

"No. Why shouldn't you stay till Monday?"

The face fell, the smile disappeared; but she answered, saving her self-respect,

"Saturday is more convenient for—for arriving in town. I think we had better fix Saturday, Dale."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“As you like. Sorry to lose you, Nell.”

He sauntered off to the smoking-room to join Philip. When Philip came into the drawing-room half an hour later in search of a book, he found Nellie sitting before the fire. He took his stand on the hearth-rug, and looked steadily down on her.

“Once upon a time,” he said, “there was a very beautiful bird who, as it chanced, grew up with a lot of crows. For a long while he liked the crows, and the crows liked him—very much, some of them. Both he and the crows were pleased when the eagles and all the swell birds admired him, and said nice things about him, and wanted to know him—and the crows who liked him most, were most pleased. Presently he did come to know the eagles and the other swell birds, and he liked them very much, and he began to get a little tired of the old crows, and by and by he left their company a good deal. He was a polite bird, and a kind bird, and never told them that he didn’t want them any more. But they saw he didn’t.”

There was a little sob from the arm-chair.

“Whereupon some of them broke their hearts, and others—didn’t. The others were wisest, Nellie.”

He paused, gazing down at the distressful little heap of crumpled drapery and roughened gleaming hair.

“Much wisest. He was not a bad bird as birds go—but not a bird to break one’s heart about, Nellie: what bird is?”

There was another sob. Philip looked despairingly at the ceiling, and exclaimed under his breath,



## A FABLE ABOUT BIRDS

"I wish to God she wouldn't cry!"

He took his book from the mantelpiece where he had laid it and moved towards the door. But he came back again, unable to leave her like that, and walked restlessly about the room, stopping every now and then to stand over her, and wonder what he could do.

Presently he took a feverish little hand in his, and pressed it as it lay limp there.

"The old crows stood by one another, Nellie," he said, and he thought he felt a sudden grip of his hand, coming and timidly in an instant going.

It seemed to comfort her to hold his hand. The sobs ceased, and presently she looked up and said, with a smile,

"I always used to cry at going back to school."

"Going back to work," said Philip, "is one of the few things in the world really worth crying about."

"Yes, isn't it?" she said, unblushingly availing herself of the shelter of his affected cynicism. She was afraid he might go on talking about crows, a topic which had been all very well, and even a little comforting, when she was hidden among the cushions, but would not do now.

"And London is so horrid in winter," she continued. "Are you going back soon?"

"Oh, I shall wait a little and look after Dale."

"Dale never tells one what is happening."

"I'll keep you posted, in case there's a revolution in Denborough, or anything of that sort."

A step was heard outside. With a sudden bound Nellie reached the piano, sat down, and began to play a lively air. Dale came in, looking suspiciously at the pair.

"I thought you'd gone to bed, Nellie."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Just going. Mr. Hume and I have been talking."

"About the affairs of the nation," said Philip.

"But I'm off now. Good-night, Dale."

Dale looked closely at her.

"What are your eyes red for? Have you been crying?"

"*Crying*, Dale? What nonsense! I've been roasting them before the fire, that's all; and if they are red, it's not polite to say so, is it, Mr. Hume?"

"Rightly understood, criticism is a compliment, as the reviewers say when they slate you," remarked Philip. "He might not have noticed your eyes at all."

"Inconceivable," said Dale politely, for he was feeling very kindly-disposed to this pretty girl, who came when he wanted her, and went when—well, after a reasonably long visit.

"Good-night, Dale. I'm so sorry about—Mr. Roberts, you know."

Dale, having no further use for this grievance, was graciously pleased to let it be forgotten.

"Oh, you couldn't know he'd be such a brute. Good-night, Nellie."

The two men returned to the smoking-room. Philip, looking for a piece of paper wherewith to light his pipe, happened to notice a little bundle of proof-sheets lying on the table.

"Ah, the spring bubbling again?" he asked.

Dale nodded.

"My dear fellow, how are the rest of us to get our masterpieces noticed? You are a monopolist."

"It's only a little volume."

"What's it about? May I look?"

"Oh, if you like," answered Dale carelessly; but he kept his eye on his friend.



## A FABLE ABOUT BIRDS

Philip took up the first sheet, and read the title-page; he smiled, and, turning over, came to the dedication.

“You call it *Amor Patriæ*?”

“Yes. Do you like the title?”

“Hum! There was no thought of pleasing me when it was christened, I presume. And you dedicate it——”

“Oh, is that there?”

“Yes, that’s there—‘*To her that shall be named hereafter.*’”

Dale poked the fire before he answered.

“Yes,” he said, “that’s the dedication.”

“So I see. Well, I hope she’ll like them. It is an enviable privilege to confer immortality.”

“I’ll confer it on you, if you like.”

“Yes, do. It will be less trouble than getting it for myself.”

“Under the title of ‘The Snarler.’”

Philip stood on the hearth-rug and warmed himself.

“My dear Dale,” he said, “I do not snarl. A wise author pleases each section of the public in turn. Hitherto you have pleased me and my kind, and Roberts and his kind, and Arthur Angell and his kind—who are, by the way, not worth pleasing, for they expect presentation copies. Now, in this new work, which is, I understand, your tribute to the nation which has the honour to bear you, you will please——” He paused.

“I always write to please myself,” said Dale.

“Yourself,” continued Philip, “this mysterious lady, and, I think we may add, the Mayor of Market Denborough.”

“Go to the devil!” said the poet.



## CHAPTER XII

### A DEDICATION—AND A DESECRATION

A FEW weeks later, the Mayor stood at his door, one bright morning in January, holding a parley with Alderman Johnstone.

“I dessay now,” said the Mayor, “that you ain’t been in the way of seein’ the Squire lately?”

“I see him last when he signed my lease,” answered the Alderman, with a grim smile, “and that’s a month come to-morrow.”

“I had a conversation with him yesterday, and after touchin’ on the matter of that last pavin’ contract,—he’d heard o’ your son-in-law gettin’ it, Johnstone,—he got talkin’ about Mr. Bannister.”

“Ay? did he?”

“And about his noo book. ‘It’s a blessin’,’ he says, ‘to see a young man of such promise shakin’ himself free of that pestilential trash.’ He meant your opinions by that, Johnstone.”

“Supposing ’e did, what then? I don’t label my opinions to please the customers like as some do their physic.”

The Mayor was not in a fighting mood; his mind was busy with speculations, and he ignored the challenge.

“Queer start Mr. Bannister showin’ up at the church bazaar, eh? Spent a heap o’ money, too. I met Mr. Hume, and asked him about it, and he said——”

“It wa’n’t no business o’ yours, didn’t he?”



## DEDICATION—AND DESECRATION

“Mr. Hume—he’s a gentleman, Johnstone,” remarked the Mayor in grave rebuke.

“Well, what did ’e say?”

“That where the carcass was, the eagles ’ud be gathered together.”

Mr. Johnstone smiled a smile of pity for the Mayor’s density.

“Well, what do you suppose he meant?” asked the Mayor in reply to the smile.

“Where the gells is, the lads is,” said the Alderman, with a wink, as he passed on his way.

This most natural, reasonable, and charitable explanation of Dale’s conduct in identifying himself with the Vicar’s pastoral labours had, oddly enough, suggested itself to no one else, unless it might be to Captain Gerard Ripley. His presence had been hailed on the one side, and anathematised on the other, as an outward sign of an inward conversion, and his lavish expenditure had been set down to a repentant spirit rather than a desire to gratify any particular stall-holder. The Vicar had just read *Amor Patriæ*, and he remarked to every one he met that the transition from an appreciation of the national greatness to an adhesion to the national Church was but a short step.

Unhappily, in a moment of absence, he chanced to say so to Colonel Smith, who was at the bazaar for the purpose of demonstrating his indifferent impartiality towards all religious sects.

“You might as well say,” answered the Colonel in scorn, “that because a man stands by the regiment, he’s bound to be thick with the chaplain.”

Captain Ripley alone, with the penetration born of jealousy, attributed Dale’s presence simply and solely to the same motive as had produced his own,



## A CHANGE OF AIR

to wit, a desire to be where Miss Delane was. The Captain was a little sore; he had known Janet from childhood, they had exchanged many children's vows, and when he was sixteen and she thirteen, she had accepted a Twelfth Night cake ring from him. The flirtation had always proceeded in its gentle ambling course, and the Captain had returned on long leave with the idea that it was time to put the natural termination in the way of being reached. Janet disappointed him; she ridiculed his tender references to bygone days, characterising what had passed as boy-and-girl nonsense, and perseveringly kept their intercourse on a dull level of friendliness. On the other hand, whatever might be the nature of her acquaintance with Dale Bannister, it was at least clear that it was marked by no such uneventful monotony. Sometimes she would hardly speak to him; at others she cared to speak to no one else. The Captain would have profited ill by the opportunities a residence in garrison towns offers, if he had not recognised that these changeful relations were fraught with peril to his hopes.

At the bazaar, for example, he was so much moved by a long conversation between Janet and Dale, which took place over the handing of a cup of tea, that he unburdened himself to his friend Sir Harry Fulmer. Now Sir Harry was in a bad temper; he had his object in attending as the Captain had, and Colonel Smith had just told him that Tora was not coming.

"Who is the fellow?" demanded Captain Ripley.

"Writes poetry."

"I never heard of him."



## DEDICATION—AND DESECRATION

“I daresay not. It's not much in your line, is it?”

“Well, he's a queer-looking beggar.”

“Think so? Now I call him a good-looking chap.”

“Why the deuce doesn't he get his hair cut?”

“Don't know. Perhaps Janet Delane likes it long.”

“I hate that sort of fellow, Harry.”

“He's not a bad chap.”

“Does the Squire like him?”

“I don't know, and I don't care. How beastly hot this room is! I shall go.”

“I say, Harry, I've only just come back, you know. Is there anything on?”

“Well, if you want to take a hand, I should cut in pretty sharp,” said Sir Harry, elbowing his way to the door.

Captain Ripley, impatiently refusing to buy a negro doll which the Vicar's daughter pressed on his favourable notice, leant against the wall and grimly regarded Dale Bannister.

The latter was just saying,

“Have you looked at the verses at all, Miss Delane?”

“I have read every one, over and over. They are splendid.”

“Oh, I'm new to that sort of thing.”

“Yes, but it's so—such a joy to me to see you doing what is really worthy of you.”

“If there's any credit, it's yours.”

“Now why do you say that? It isn't true, and it just spoils it.”

“Spoils it?” said Dale, who thought girls liked compliments.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Yes. If you had really only done it to please—an individual, it would be worth nothing. You couldn't help doing it. I knew you couldn't."

"At any rate, you must accept the responsibility of having put it into my head."

"Not even that, Mr. Bannister."

"Oh, but that's the meaning of the dedication."

No one is quite free from guile. Janet answered,

"The dedication is rather mysterious, Mr. Bannister."

"I meant it to be so to all the world."

"Oh, did you?"

"Except you."

Janet blushed and smiled.

"I wonder," pursued Dale, "if I shall ever be allowed to name that lady?"

"That will depend on whether she wishes it."

"Of course. Do you think she will—hereafter?"

"Won't you have another cup? It's only half a crown."

"Yes, two more, please. Do you think she will?"

"How thirsty you seem to be!"

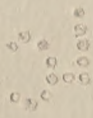
"Will she?"

"Now, Mr. Bannister, I mustn't neglect all my customers. See, Mrs. Gilkison is selling nothing."

"But will she?"

"Certainly not—unless you go and buy something from Mrs. Gilkison."

Now, whether Janet were really concerned for Mrs. Gilkison, or whether she had caught sight of Captain Ripley's lowering countenance, or whether she merely desired to avoid pledging herself to Dale, it is immaterial, and also impossible to say.





## DEDICATION—AND DESECRATION

Dale felt himself dismissed, with the consolation of perceiving that his dedication had not been unfavourably received in the quarter to which it was addressed.

Accordingly it was in a cheerful frame of mind that he set out for home, scattering most of his purchases among the children before he went.

He was in a kindly mood, and when he saw James Roberts coming up High Street, he did not, as he had once or twice lately, cross the road to avoid meeting him, but held on his path, determined to offer a friendly greeting.

When the Doctor came up, he stopped and took from his breast-pocket the little green volume which contained Dale's latest poems. He held it up before the author's eyes.

"Ah, Roberts, I see you have the new work. How do you like it?"

He tried to speak easily, but the Doctor did not appear to be in a conciliatory temper.

"Are these things really yours?" he asked.

"Of course they are."

"This wretched Jingo doggrel, yours?"

Dale felt this unjust. The verses might not express the Doctor's views, but an immortal poet's works are not lightly to be called doggrel.

"What a narrow-minded beggar you are!" he exclaimed.

The Doctor answered nothing. Buttoning up his threadbare coat, so as to leave his arms free, with an effort he tore the leaves from their cover, rent them across, flung them on the road, and trod them into the mud. Then, without a word, he passed on his way, while Dale stood and stared at the dishonoured wreck.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“He’s mad—stark mad!” he declared at last.  
“How ill the poor chap looks, too!”

The Doctor hurried down the street, with a strange malicious smile on his face. Every now and then his hand sought his breast-pocket again, and hugged a cheque for a hundred pounds which lay there. It was his last money in the world; when that was gone, his banking account was exhausted, and nothing remained but his wife’s pittance—and nothing more was coming. Yet he had devoted that sum to a purpose, and now he stopped at Alderman Johnstone’s door, and asked for the master of the house, still grimly smiling at the thought of what he was preparing for Dale Bannister, if only Johnstone would help him. Johnstone had a lease now, he was independent—if only he would help him!

The Alderman listened to the plan.

“It’s a new trade for me,” said he, with a grin.

“I find the stock—I have it ready. And—” He held up the cheque.

The Alderman’s eyes glistened.

“They can’t touch me,” he said, “and I should like to ’ave a shy at the Squire. ’Ere’s my ’and upon it.”

A day or two afterwards, Dale heard that the sale of *Sluggards* was increasing by leaps and bounds. A single house had taken five hundred copies. *Amor Patriæ* had evidently given a fresh impetus to the earlier work, in spite of the remarkable difference of tone which existed between them.

“It shows,” said Dale complacently, to Philip Hume, “that most people are not such intolerant idiots as that fellow Roberts.”



## DEDICATION—AND DESECRATION

But what it really did show will appear in due season. Dale did not know ; nor did Philip, for he said, with a fine sneer,

“It shows that immorality doesn’t matter if it’s combined with sound political principles, old man.”



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GENIUS

DR. SPINK sat in his comfortable dining-room with his after-dinner glass of wine before him. The snow was falling and the rain beating against the windows, but the Doctor had finished his work, and feared only that some sudden call would compel him to face the fury of the weather again. A few months back, he would have greeted any summons, however unreasonable the hour, and thought a new patient well bought at the price of a spoilt evening. But of late the world had smiled upon him, the hill which had looked so steep was proving easy to climb, and he was already considering whether he should not take a partner, to relieve him of the more irksome parts of his duty. He pulled his neatly-trimmed whisker and caressed his smooth-shaven chin, as he reflected how the folly of that mad fellow, Roberts, had turned to his advantage. No man could say that he had deviated an inch from professional propriety, or pressed his advantage the least unfairly. He had merely persevered on the lines he laid down for himself on his first arrival. The success, which astonished even himself, had come to him, partly no doubt, because merit must make its way, but mainly because his rival had wilfully flung away his chances, preferring—and to Dr. Spink it seemed a preference almost insane—to speak his mind, whatever it might be, rather than, like a wise man, hold his tongue and fill his pockets.



## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GENIUS

So Roberts had willed, and hence the Vicarage, the Grange, and many other houses now knew his footstep no more, and Spink filled his place. As he pondered on this, Dr. Spink spared a pang of pity for his beaten competitor, wondering what in the world the man meant to live upon.

The door-bell rang. He heard it with a sigh—the half-pleased, half-weary, resigned sigh that a man utters when fortune gives him no rest in getting gain. A moment later he was on his way to the surgery, to see a lady who would not send in her name or business.

He recognised Ethel Roberts with surprise, when she raised her veil. They had known one another to bow to, but he could not imagine what brought her to his surgery.

“Mrs. Roberts! Is there anything—?”

“Oh, Dr. Spink, you must forgive me for coming. I am in great trouble, and I thought you might help me.”

“Pray sit down. Is any one ill—your little boy?”

“No, he’s not ill. It’s—it’s about my husband.”

“I hope Mr. Roberts is not ill?”

“I don’t know,” she said nervously. “That’s what I want to ask you. Have you seen him lately?”

“No, not very: I passed him in the street the other day.”

“He’s gone to London, suddenly, I don’t know why. Oh, he’s been so strange lately!”

“I thought he looked worried. Tell me about it,” said Dr. Spink, moved now with genuine pity for the pale haggard face before him.

“Ever since—but you mustn’t tell I came to you—or spoke to anybody, I mean—will you?”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

He reassured her, and she continued,

“Ever since his quarrel with Mr. Bannister—you know about it?—there is something the matter with him. He is moody, and absent-minded, and—and hasty, and he settles to nothing. And now he is gone off like this.”

“Come, Mrs. Roberts, you must compose yourself. I suppose he has let these politics worry him.”

“He seems to care nothing for—for his home or the baby, you know; he does nothing but read, or wander up and down the room.”

“It sounds as if he wanted a rest and a change. You say he has gone away?”

“Yes, but on business, I think.”

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you much, unless he calls me in and lets me have a look at him.”

“He’ll never do that!” she exclaimed, before she could stop herself.

Dr. Spink took no notice of her outburst.

“If he comes back no better, send me a line, Mrs. Roberts, and we’ll see. And mind you let me know if you or the baby want any advice.”

“You’re very kind, Dr. Spink. I—I’m sorry James is so——”

“Oh, that’s a symptom. If he gets right, he won’t be like that. Your jacket’s too thin for such a night. Let me send you home in the brougham.”

Ethel refused the offer, and started on her return, leaving Dr. Spink shaking a thoughtful head in the surgery doorway.

“It really looks,” he said, “as if he was a bit queer. But what can I do? Poor little woman!”

And, not being able to do anything, he went back and finished his glass of port. Then, for his



## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GENIUS

dinner had been postponed till late by business, and it was half-past ten, he went to bed.

Ethel beat her way down the High Street against the wind and snow, shutting her eyes in face of the blinding shower, and pushing on with all her speed, to rejoin her baby, whom she had left alone. When, wet and weary, she reached her door, to her surprise she saw a man waiting there. For a moment, she joyously thought it was her husband, but as the man came forward to meet her, she recognised Philip Hume.

“Out on such a night, Mrs. Roberts!”

She murmured an excuse, and he went on,

“Is the Doctor in? I came to look him up.”

“No, he’s away in London, Mr. Hume.”

“In London? What for?”

“I don’t know.”

“May I come in for a moment?” asked Philip, who had been looking at her closely.

“If you like,” she answered in some surprise. “I’m afraid there’s no fire.”

Philip had followed her in, and seen the grate in the sitting-room with no fire lighted.

“No fire?” he exclaimed.

“There is one in my room where baby is,” she explained.

“There ought to be one here too,” said he. “You’re looking ill.”

“Oh, I’m not ill, Mr. Hume—I’m not indeed.”

Philip had come on an errand. There are uses even in gossips, and he had had a talk with his friend the Mayor that day.

“Where are the coals?” he asked.

“There are some in the scuttle,” she said.

He looked and found a few small pieces. The



## A CHANGE OF AIR

fire was laid with a few more. Philip lit them and threw on all the rest. Then he went to the door, and shouted,

“Wilson!”

The small shrewd-faced man who waited on Dale Bannister appeared. He was pushing a wheelbarrow before him.

“Wheel it into the passage,” said Philip; “and then go. And, mind, not a word!”

Wilson looked insulted.

“I don’t talk, sir,” said he.

Philip returned to the room.

“Mrs. Roberts,” he said, “listen to me. I am a friend of your husband’s. Will you let me help you?”

“Indeed, I need no help.”

“I know you are frozen,” he went on; “and—where is the servant?”

“She has left. I—I haven’t got another yet,” she faltered.

“In the passage,” Philip went on, “there is a wheelbarrow. It holds coals, food, and drink. It’s for you.”

She started up.

“I can’t—indeed I can’t! Jim wouldn’t like it.”

“Jim be hanged! I’ll settle with him. You’re to take them. Do you hear?”

She did not answer. He walked up to her and put a little canvas bag in her hands.

“There’s money. No, take it. I shall keep an account.”

“I really don’t need it.”

“You do—you know you do. How much money has he left you?”

She laid her hand on his arm.



## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GENIUS

"He's not himself, he isn't indeed, Mr. Hume, or he wouldn't——"

"No, of course he isn't. So I do what he would, if he were himself. You were going to starve."

"He will be angry."

"Then don't tell him. He'll never notice. Now will he?"

"He notices nothing now," she said.

"And you'll take them? Come, think of what's-his-name—the baby, you know."

"You're too kind to me."

"Nonsense! Of course we look after you, Mrs. Roberts."

"Mr. Hume, do you think—what do you think is the matter with Jim?"

"Oh, I think he's an old fool, Mrs. Roberts, and you may tell him so from me. No, no, he'll be all right in a week or two. Meanwhile, we're going to make you and Tommy—oh, Johnny, is it?—comfortable."

He did not leave her till she had consented to accept all he offered: then he went back to Littlehill.

"I think, Dale," he said, "Roberts must be mad. He left his wife and child starving."

"Did she take the things?"

"Yes, I made her."

"That's all right. What a strange beggar he is! He can't be quite right in his head."

"Fancy that poor little woman left like that!"

"Horrible!" said Dale with a shudder. "At any rate we can prevent that. I'm so glad you thought of it."

"Old Hedger told me they had ordered nothing for three days."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"How the deuce does Hedger know everything?"

"It's lucky he knew this, isn't it?"

"By Jove, it is! Because, you know, Phil, I feel a kind of responsibility."

"Nonsense, Dale! Not really?"

"Oh, you needn't laugh. Of course I couldn't know the man was a sort of lunatic. One doesn't write for lunatics."

"Perhaps they ought to be considered, being so numerous."

"However, it's all right now. Awfully obliged to you, Phil."

"I wonder if he'll come back."

"Roberts? Why shouldn't he?"

"I don't know, but he's quite capable of just cutting the whole concern."

"I think he's capable of anything."

"Except appreciating *Amor Patriæ*, eh?"

Dale, having got the Roberts family off his mind, drifted to another topic.

"I say, Phil, old chap, will you stop playing the fool for once, and give me your advice?"

"What about?" asked Philip, throwing himself into an arm-chair.

"What," said Dale, gravely, filling his pipe, "do you think about getting married?"

"Are you thinking of it?"

"Discuss marriage in the abstract."

"It is a position of greater responsibility and less freedom."

"Yes, I know that. But a lot depends on the girl, doesn't it?"

"I expect so."

"I say, Phil, what do you think of Ripley?"



## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GENIUS

"He seemed a decent enough fellow."

"Do you think—I mean, do you call him an attractive fellow?"

"Oh, uncommonly!"

"Really?"

"Well, why not?"

Dale fidgeted in his chair, and relit the pipe, which had gone out. He was much too perturbed to give to the filling of it the attention that operation needs.

"I suppose he'll be rich, and a swell, and all that," he went on.

"No doubt—but not a Victorian poet."

"Don't be a fool!"

"I meant it kindly. Some girls like poets."

"They were awfully kind about *Amor Patriæ* at the Grange to-night."

"Oh, you've been there?"

"You know I have. Ripley was there. I don't think I care much about him, Phil."

"Don't you? Does he like you?"

Dale laughed, as he rose to go to bed.

"Not much, I think," said he.

Philip also, being left companionless, got up and knocked out his pipe. Then he stood looking into the dying embers for a minute or two, and thinking, as he warmed his hands with the last of the heat. "Poor little Nellie!" he said. After a pause, he said it again; and once again after that. But then, as saying it was no use at all, he sighed and went to bed.



## CHAPTER XIV

### MR. DELANE LIKES THE IDEA

ON a bright morning, when February was in one of its brief moods of kindliness, Janet Delane was in the garden, and flitting from it into the hothouses in search of flowers. It was half-past eleven, and Captain Ripley had kept her gossiping long after breakfast; that was the worst of idle men staying in a house. So she hastened to and fro in a great parade of business-like activity, and, as she went, she would sing blithely, and stop and smile to herself, and break into singing again, and call merrily to her dog, a rotund, slate-coloured bundle of hair that waddled after her, and answered, if he were given time to get within earshot, to the name of Mop. Mop was more sedate than his mistress: she only pretended to be on business bent, while he had been dragged out to take a serious constitutional, on account of his growing corpulence, and it made him sulky to be called here and beckoned there, and told there were rats, and cats, and what not—whereas in truth there was no such thing. But Janet did not mind his sulkiness; she smiled, and sang, and smiled, for she was thinking—but is nothing to be sacred from a prying race? It is no concern of any one's what she was thinking, and no doubt she did not desire it to be known, or she would have told Captain Ripley in the course of that long gossip.

The Captain stood gazing at her out of the win-



## MR. DELANE LIKES THE IDEA

dow, with his hands in his pockets and a doleful look of bewilderment on his face. He stared out into the garden, but he was listening to Mrs. Delane, and wondering uneasily if he were really such a dolt as his hostess seemed to consider.

"You know, Gerard," said Mrs. Delane in her usual tone of suave sovereignty, "that I am anxious to help you all I can. I have always looked forward to it as an event which would give us all pleasure, and I know my husband agrees with me. But really we can't do anything if you don't help yourself."

The Captain gnawed his moustache and thrust his hands deeper into his pockets.

"I can't make her out," said he. "I can't get any farther with her."

"It's not the way to 'get farther,'" answered Mrs. Delane, marking the quotation by a delicate emphasis, "with any girl to stand on the other side of the room and scowl whenever she talks to another man."

"You mean Bannister?"

"I mean anybody. I don't care whether it's Mr. Bannister or not. And it's just as useless to pull a long face and look tragic whenever she makes fun of you."

"She didn't use to be like that last time I was home."

"My dear boy, what has that got to do with it? She was a child then."

"She's always blowing me up. This morning she asked me why I didn't go to India instead of wasting my time doing nothing in London."

This was certainly unfeeling conduct on Janet's part. Mrs. Delane sighed.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"I don't know that I quite understand her either, Gerard. There's the Squire calling you. He's ready to ride, I expect."

When Janet came in, she found her mother alone.

"Where's Gerard?" she asked.

"He's gone for a ride."

"Is he staying to-night?"

"Yes, two or three days, I think."

"Well, dear, I am glad we amuse him. There doesn't seem much for a man to do here, does there?"

"Don't you like him to be here?"

"Oh, I don't mind, only he wastes my time."

"I begin to think he's wasting his own too," remarked Mrs. Delane.

"Oh, he's got nothing else to do with it—or at least he does nothing else with it."

"You know what I mean, Janet dear."

"I suppose I do, but how can I help it? I do all I can to show him it's no use."

"You used to like him very much."

"Oh, so I do now. But that's quite different."

The world goes very crooked. Mrs. Delane sighed again.

"It would have pleased your father very much."

"I'm so sorry. But I couldn't care for a man of that sort."

"What's the matter with the man, my dear?"

"That's just it, mamma. Nothing—nothing bad—and nothing good. Gerard is like heaps of men I know."

"I think you underrate him. His father was just the same, and he was very distinguished in the House."



## MR. DELANE LIKES THE IDEA

Janet's gesture betrayed but slight veneration for the High Court of Parliament, as she answered, "They always say that about dull people."

"Well, if it's no use, the sooner the poor boy knows it the better."

"I can't tell him till he asks me, can I, dear? Though I'm sure he might see it for himself."

Mrs. Delane, when she made up her mind to sound her daughter's inclinations, had expected to find doubt, indecision, perhaps even an absence of any positive inclination towards Captain Ripley. She had not been prepared for Janet's unquestioning assumption that the thing was not within the range of consideration. A marriage so excellent from a material point of view, with one who enjoyed all the advantages old intimacy and liking could give, seemed to claim more than the unhesitating dismissal with which Janet relegated it to the limbo of impossibility, with never a thought for all the prospects it held out and never a sigh for the wealth and rank it promised. Of course the Delanes needed no alliances to establish their position; still, as the Squire had no son, it would have been pleasant if his daughter had chosen a husband from the leading family in the county. The more Mrs. Delane thought, the more convinced she became that there must be a reason; and if there were, it could be looked for only in one direction. She wondered whether the Squire's *penchant* for his gifted young neighbour was strong enough to make him welcome him as a son-in-law. Frankly, her own was not.

Mr. Delane came into luncheon, but Captain Ripley sent a message of excuse. He had ridden over to Sir Harry Fulmer's, and would spend the



## A CHANGE OF AIR

afternoon there. Mrs. Delane's reception of the news conveyed delicately that such conduct was only what might be expected, if one considered how Janet treated the poor fellow, but the Squire was too busy to appreciate the subtleties of his wife's demeanour.

Important events were in the way to happen. Denshire, like many other counties, had recently made up its mind that it behoved it to educate itself, and a building had risen in Denborough which was to serve as an Institute of technical education, a school of agriculture, a centre of learning, a home of instructive recreation, a haven for the peripatetic lecturer, and several things besides. Lord Cransford had consented to open this temple of the arts, which was now near completion, and an inauguration by him would have been suitable and proper. But the Squire had something far better to announce. The Lord-Lieutenant was, next month, to be honoured by a visit from a Royal Duke, and the Royal Duke had graciously consented to come over and open the Institute. It would be an occasion the like of which Denborough had seldom seen, and Lord Cransford and Mr. Delane might well be pardoned the deputy-providential air with which they went about for the few days next following on the successful completion of this delicate negotiation.

"Now," said the Squire, when he had detailed the Prince's waverings and vacillations, his he-woulds and he-would-nots, and the culmination of his gracious assent, "I have a great idea, and I want you to help me, Jan."

"How can I help?" asked Janet, who was already in a flutter of loyalty.



## MR. DELANE LIKES THE IDEA

“When the Duke comes, I want him to have a splendid reception.”

“I’m sure he will, my dear,” said Mrs. Delane; “at least I hope that we are loyal.”

“We want,” continued the Squire, “to show him all our resources.”

“Well, papa, that won’t take him very long. There’s the old Mote Hall, and the Roman pavement and— Oh, but will he come here, papa—to the Grange?”

“I hope he will take luncheon here.”

“How delightful!” exclaimed Janet joyfully.

“Goodness!” said Mrs. Delane anxiously.

“But, Jan, I want to show him our poet!”

“Papa! Mr. Bannister!”

“Yes. I want Bannister to write a poem of welcome.”

“My dear,” remarked Mrs. Delane, “Mr. Bannister doesn’t like princes;” and she smiled satirically.

“What do you say, Jan?” asked the Squire, smiling in his turn.

“Oh yes, do ask him, papa. I wish he would.”

“Well, will you ask him to?”

“Really, George, you are the person to suggest it.”

“Yes, Mary. But if I fail? Now, Jan!”

“Oh don’t be foolish papa. It’s not likely——”

“Never mind. Will you?”

But Janet had, it seemed, finished her meal; at least she had left the room. Mrs. Delane looked vexed. The Squire laughed, for he was a man who enjoyed his little joke.

“Poor Jan!” he said. “It’s a shame to chaff her on her conquests.”

Mrs. Delane’s fears had been confirmed by her



## A CHANGE OF AIR

daughter's reception of the raillery. She would have answered in the same tone, and accepted the challenge, if the banter had not hit the mark.

"It's a pity," said Mrs. Delane, "to encourage her to think so much about this young Bannister."

"Eh?" said the Squire, looking up from his plate.

"She thinks quite enough about him already, and hears enough too."

"Well, I suppose he's something out of the common run, in Denshire at all events, and so he interests her."

"She'll have nothing to say to Gerard Ripley."

"What? Has he asked her?"

"No, but I found out from her. He's quite indifferent to her."

"I'm sorry for that, but there's time yet. I don't give up hope."

"Do you think you help your wishes by asking her to use her influence to make Dale Bannister write poems?"

The Squire laid down his napkin and looked at his wife.

"Oh!" he said, after a pause.

"Yes," said Mrs. Delane. "Are you surprised?"

"Yes, I am rather."

He got up and walked about the room, jangling the money in his pocket.

"We know nothing about young Bannister," he said.

"Except that he's the son of a Dissenting minister and has lived with very queer people."

The Squire frowned; but presently his face cleared. "I daresay we're troubling ourselves quite unnecessarily. I haven't noticed anything."

"I daresay not, George," said Mrs. Delane.



## MR. DELANE LIKES THE IDEA

“Come, Mary, you know it’s a weakness of yours to find out people’s love-affairs before they do themselves.”

“Very well, George,” answered she in a resigned tone. “I have told you, and you will act as you think best. Only, if you wouldn’t like him for a son-in-law——”

“Well, my dear, you do go ahead.”

“Try to put him out of Janet’s head, not in it;” and Mrs. Delane swept out of the room.

The Squire went to his study, thinking as he went. He would have liked the Ripley connection. Lord Cransford was an old friend, and the match would have been unimpeachable. Still—The Squire could not quite analyse his feelings, but he did feel that the idea of Dale Bannister was not altogether unattractive. By birth, of course, he was a nobody, and he had done and said, or at least said he had done, or would like to do,—for the Squire on reflection softened down his condemnation,—wild things; but he was a distinguished man, a man of brains, a force in the country. One must move with the times. Now-a-days brains opened every front door, and genius was a passport everywhere. He was not sure that he disliked the idea. Women were such sticklers for old notions. Now, he had never been a—a stick-in-the-mud Tory. If Dale went on improving as he was doing, the Squire would think twice before he refused him. But there! very likely it was only Mary’s match-making instincts making a mountain out of a molehill.

“I shall keep at Jan about that poem,” he ended by saying. “It would be a fine facer for the Radicals.”



## CHAPTER XV

### HOW IT SEEMED TO THE DOCTOR

JAMES ROBERTS made to himself some excuse of business for his sudden expedition to London, but in reality he was moved to go by the desire for sympathy. There are times and moods when a man will do many strange things, if thereby he may gain the comfort of an approving voice. It was not so much his straitened means and impoverished household, with the silent suppressed reproach of his wife's sad face, which made Denborough for the time uninhabitable to the Doctor. The selfishness engendered by his absorption in outside affairs armed him against these; he was more oppressed, and finally overcome and routed to flight, by the universal, unbroken, and unhesitating condemnation and contempt that he met with. The severe banned him as wicked, the charitable dubbed him crazy; even Johnstone, whom he had bought, gave him no sympathy. He could not share his savage sneers, or his bitter mirth, or his passionate indignation, with a man to whom the whole affair was a matter of business or of personal grudge. He felt that he must escape for a time, and seek society in which he could unbosom himself and speak from his heart without stirring horror or ridicule. Arthur Angell at least, who, in regard to Dale and Dale's views, had always been a better royalist than the King, would share his anger and appreciate his meditated revenge. The



## HOW IT SEEMED TO THE DOCTOR

lesson he meant to give the backslider was so appropriate and of such grim humour that Arthur must be delighted with it.

On Dale's departure, Arthur Angell had moved into the little flat at the top of the tall building in Chelsea, and there he cultivated the Muses with a devotion which was its own ample reward. Though to be passing rich on forty pounds a year is, with the best will, impossible in London, as it is to-day, yet to be passing happy on one hundred and fifty is not beyond the range of youth and enthusiasm, when the future still provides a gorgeous setting and background, wherein the sordid details of the present are merged and lose their prominence, and all trials are but landmarks by which the hopeful grub counts his nearer approach to butterflydom. The little room, the humble chop, the occasional pit, the constant tobacco, the unending talks with fellows like-minded and like-pursed,—all these had the beauty of literary tradition, and if not a guarantee, seemed at least a condition of future fame. So Arthur often said to Mrs. Hodge, who lived in the same block, a couple of floors lower down; and Mrs. Hodge heartily agreed as she instanced, in confirmation of the doctrine, how the late Mr. Hodge had once played the King at two pound ten, *consule Pratt*, and had lived to manage his own theatre. This was to compare small things with great, felt Arthur, but the truth is true in whatever sphere it works.

Into his happy life there broke suddenly the tempestuous form of the Denborough Doctor. He arrived with but a pound or two in his pocket, with wild ideas of employment on ultra-Radical newspapers; above all, with the full load of his rage



## A CHANGE OF AIR

against Dale Bannister, the traitor. He strode up and down the little room, tugging his beard and fiercely denouncing the renegade, while Arthur looked at his troubled eyes and knitted brows, and wondered if his mind were not unhinged. Who could talk like that about Dale, if he were sane? Arthur would have chaffed his friend, laughed at him, ridiculed him, perhaps slyly hinted at the illicit charms of rank and wealth, for which the poet's old mistress mourned deserted. But to speak in hate and rancour! And what was he plotting?

But when he heard the plot, his face cleared, and he laughed.

"I think you're hard on Dale," he said; "but, after all, it will be a good joke."

"Johnstone will do it," exclaimed the Doctor, pausing in his stride. "His shop window will be full of them. He'll have sandwich-men all over the place. Bannister won't be able to go out without being met by his own words—the words he denies. I'll cram them down his throat."

Arthur laughed again.

"It will be awkward when he's walking with old Delane."

"Ay, and with that girl who's got hold of him. He sha'n't forget what he wrote—nor shall a soul in Denborough either. I'll make his treachery plain, if I spend my last farthing."

"When are you going back?"

"In a week. It will all be ready in a week. He'll know who did it. Curse him!"

"My dear Doctor, aren't you a little——"

"Are you like that too?" burst out Roberts. "Have none of you any sincerity? Is it sham with all of you? You laugh as if it were a joke."



## HOW IT SEEMED TO THE DOCTOR

"I can't be angry with old Dale. I expect he'll only laugh himself, you know. It will be good fun."

Roberts looked at him in hopeless wrath. It seemed to him that these men, who wrote the words and proclaimed the truths which had turned his life and reformed his soul, were themselves but playing with what they taught. Were they only actors—or amusing themselves?

"You are as bad as he is," he said angrily, and stalked out of the room.

Arthur, puzzled with his unmanageable guest, went down, as he often did, to his neighbours, and laid the whole case before Mrs. Hodge and Nellie Fane. He found them both in, Nellie having just returned from an afternoon concert where she had been singing.

"I believe the fellow's half mad, you know," said Arthur.

"If he isn't, he ought to be ashamed of himself," said Mrs. Hodge, and she launched on a description of Mrs. Roberts' pitiable state.

"Well, I don't think he's got more than five pounds in the world," responded Arthur. "And he's got no chance of making any money. Nobody dares publish what he wants to write."

"He used to be pleasant at Littlehill," Nellie remarked, "when we were first there."

"Yes, wasn't he? But he's gone quite wild over Dale. Do you know what his next move is?" And Arthur disclosed the Johnstone conspiracy.

"It will be rather sport, won't it?" he asked. "Poor old Dale!"

But no; Miss Fane did not see the "sport." She was indignant; she thought that such a trick



## A CHANGE OF AIR

was mean, malicious, and odious in the highest degree, and she was surprised that Arthur Angell could be amused at it.

"Women never see a joke," said Arthur huffily.

"Where's the joke in making Dale unhappy and—and absurd? And you call yourself his friend!"

"It's only a joke. Old Dale does deserve a dig, you know."

"And pray why? You choose your friends, why mayn't he choose his? I daresay you would be glad enough to know that sort of people if you could."

"Oh, come, Nellie! I'm not like that. Besides, it's not the people; it's what he's written."

"I've read what he's written. It's beautiful. No, I call the whole thing horrid, and just like Dr. Roberts."

"I suppose you think, just like me too?"

"If you don't write and warn Dale, I shall."

"I say, you mustn't do that. I told you in confidence. Roberts will be furious."

"What do I care for Dr. Roberts' fury? I shall write at once;" and she sat down at the table.

Arthur glanced in despair at Mrs. Hodge, but that discreet lady was entirely hidden in the evening paper.

"Well, I'll never tell you anything again, Nellie," he said.

"You'll never have the chance, unless you behave something like a gentleman," retorted Nellie.

Arthur banged the door as he went out, exclaiming,

"Damn Roberts! What does he want to make a row for?"



## HOW IT SEEMED TO THE DOCTOR

Meanwhile, the Doctor, who was angry enough with Arthur Angell to have rejoiced had he known that he had embroiled him in a quarter where Arthur was growing very anxious to stand well, was pacing the streets, nursing his resentment. His head ached, and fragments of what he had read, and half-forgotten conversations, mingling in his whirling brain, fretted and bewildered him. He could think of nothing but his wrongs and his revenge, returning always to hug himself on his own earnestness, and angrily to sneer at the weakness and treachery of his friends. Whatever it cost him or his, the world should see that there was one man ready to sacrifice himself for truth and right—and punish “that hound Dale Bannister.”

As he walked, he bought the special edition of the paper, and, in hastily glancing at it, his eye was caught by the announcement that His Royal Highness the Duke of Mercia was to visit Lord Cransford, and would open the Institute at Market Denborough. The paragraph went on to describe the preparations being made to give the Prince a loyal reception, and ended by saying that it was hoped that the eminent poet, Mr. Dale Bannister, who was resident at Denborough, would consent to write a few lines of welcome to the illustrious visitor. The writer added a word or two of good-natured banter about Mr. Bannister's appearance in a new character, and the well-known effect which the proximity of royalty was apt to have on English republicanism. “Who knows,” he concluded, “that Mr. Bannister may not figure as Sir Dale before long?”

The Doctor read the paragraph twice, the flush of anger reddening his pale face. Then he crumpled



## A CHANGE OF AIR

up the paper and flung it from him, resuming his hasty, restless walk. He could imagine the sickening scene, the rampant adulation, the blatant snob-bishness. And, in the midst, a dishonoured participator, the man who had been his leader, his liberator, the apostle of all he loved and lived by. Had the man been a hypocrite from the first? Impossible! No hypocrite could have written those burning lines which leapt to his memory and his lips. Or was he merely a weak fool? That could not be either. It was a barter, a deliberate barter of truth and honour against profit—as sordid a transaction as could be. He wanted a position in society, money, a rich wife, petting from great people—perhaps even, as that scribbler said, a ribbon to stick in his coat or a handle to fasten to his name. How could he? how could he? And the Doctor passed his hand across his hot, throbbing brow in the bewilderment of wrath.

For an hour or more he ranged the streets aimlessly, a prey to his unreasoning fury. For this man's sake he had ruined himself—led on by this man's words, he had defied the world—his world. At all hazards he had joined the daring band. Now he was forsaken, abandoned, flung aside. He and his like had served their turn. On their backs Dale Bannister had mounted. But now he had done with them, and their lot was repudiation and disdain. Roberts could not find words for his scorn and contempt. His head racked him more and more. Connected thought seemed to become impossible; he could do nothing but repeat again and again, "The traitor! The traitor!"

At last he turned home to his humble lodgings. The short hush of very early morning had fallen



## HOW IT SEEMED TO THE DOCTOR

on the streets; he met no one, and the moon shone placidly down on the solitary figure of the maddened man, wrestling with his unconquerable rage. He could not stem it; yielding to its impulse, with quivering voice and face working with passion, he stretched his clenched fist to the sky and cried,

“By God, he shall pay for it!”



## CHAPTER XVI

### "NO MORE KINGS"

AFTER her father's report and the departure of Nellie Fane, Miss Tora Smith had been pleased to reconsider her judgment of Dale Bannister, and to modify it to some extent. The poems and the suspicion, taken in conjunction, each casting a lurid light on the other, had been very bad indeed; but when Tora's mind was disabused of the suspicion, she found it in her heart to pardon the poems. Although she treated Sir Harry Fulmer with scant ceremony, she had no small respect for his opinion, and when he and the Colonel coincided in the decision that Dale need not be ostracised, she did not persist against them. She was led to be more compliant by the fact that she was organising an important Liberal gathering, and had conceived the ambition of inducing Dale to take part in the proceedings.

"Fancy, if he would write us a song!" she said,— "a song which we could sing in chorus. Wouldn't it be splendid?"

"What would the Squire say?" asked Sir Harry. Tora smiled mischievously.

"Are you," she demanded, "going to stand by and see him captured by the Grange?"

"He ought to be with us, oughtn't he?" said Sir Harry.

"Of course. And if our leader had an ounce of zeal——"



## “NO MORE KINGS”

“I’ll write to him to-day,” said Sir Harry.

“Yes; and mind you persuade him. I shall be so amused to see what Jan Delane says, if he writes us a song.”

“He won’t do it.”

“He won’t, if you go in that despairing mood. Now write at once. Write as if you expected it.”

The outcome of this conversation, together with the idea which had struck the Squire, was, of course, that Dale received, almost by the same post, an urgent request for a militant Radical ditty, and a delicate, but very flattering, suggestion that it would be most agreeable to His Royal Highness—indeed he had hinted as much in response to Lord Cransford’s question—to find the loyalty of Denborough as it were crystallised in one of Mr. Bannister’s undying productions. For the first time in his life, Dale felt a grudge against the Muses for their endowment. Could not these people let him alone? He did not desire to put himself forward: he only asked to be let alone. It was almost as repugnant to him—at least, he thought it would be—to take part in Lord Cransford’s pageant, as it certainly would be to hear the Radicals of Denborough screeching out his verses. He was a man of letters, not a politician, and he thought both requests very uncalled for. It might be that the Grange folks had some claim on him, but his acquaintance with Sir Harry Fulmer was of the slightest; and what did the man mean by talking of his “well-known views”? He was as bad as the Doctor himself. Presently Philip Hume came in, and Dale disclosed his perplexities.

“I want to please people,” he said, “but this is rather strong.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Write both," suggested Philip.

"That will enrage both of them."

"Then write neither."

"Really, Phil, you might show some interest in the matter."

"I am preoccupied. Have you been in the town to-day, Dale?"

"No."

"Then you haven't seen Johnstone's window?"

"Johnstone's window? What does Johnstone want with a window?"

"Put on your hat and come and see. Yes, come along. It concerns you."

They walked down together in the gathering dusk of the afternoon, and when they came near Johnstone's, they saw his window lighted with a blaze of gas, and a little knot of curious people standing outside. The window was full of Dale's books, and the rows of green volumes were surmounted by a large placard—"Dale Bannister, the poet of Denborough—Works on Sale Here. Ask for *The Clarion*, *The Arch-Apostates*, *Blood for Blood*;" and outside, a file of men carried boards, headed, "The Rights of the People. Read Dale Bannister! No more Kings! No more Priests! Read Dale Bannister!"

A curse broke from Dale. Philip smiled grimly.

"Who's done this?" Dale asked.

Philip pointed to a solitary figure which stood on the opposite side of the road, looking on at the spectacle. It was James Roberts, and he smiled grimly in his turn when he saw the poet and his friend.

"He put Johnstone up to it," said Philip.  
"Johnstone told me so."



## “NO MORE KINGS”

Dale was aflame. He strode quickly across the road to where the Doctor stood, and said to him hotly,

“This is your work, is it?”

The Doctor was jaunty and cool in manner.

“No, your works,” he answered, with a foolish, exasperating snigger. “Aren’t you pleased to see what notice they are attracting? I was afraid they were being forgotten in Denborough.”

“God only knows,” said Dale angrily, “why you take pleasure in annoying me; but I have borne enough of your insolence.”

“Is it insolent to spread the sale of your books?”

“You will make your jackal take those books down and stop his infernal posters, or I’ll thrash you within an inch of your life.”

“Ah!” said Roberts, and his hand stole towards his breast-pocket.

“What do you say?”

“I say that if I can make a wretched snob like you unhappy, it’s money well spent, and I’ll see you damned before I take the books down.”

Dale grasped his walking-cane and took a step forward. The Doctor stood waiting for him, smiling and keeping his hand in his pocket.

“Jim!”

The Doctor turned and saw his wife at his side. Dale fell back, lifting his hat, at the sight of the pale distressed face and the clasped hands.

“Do come home, dear!” she said, with an appealing glance.

Philip took Dale’s arm.

“Come,” he said, “let’s reason with Johnstone.”

Dale allowed himself to be led away, not know-



## A CHANGE OF AIR

ing that death had stared him in the face; for it was a loaded revolver that Roberts let fall back into the recesses of his pocket, when his wife's touch recalled for a moment his saner sense.

The reasoning with Johnstone was not a success. Dale tried threats, abuse, and entreaties, all in vain. At last he condescended to bribery, and offered Johnstone twice the sum, whatever it might be, which he had received. He felt his degradation, but the annoyance was intolerable.

The Alderman's attitude, on receiving this offer, was not without pathos. He lamented in himself an obstinate rectitude, which he declared had often stood in his way in business affairs. His political convictions, engaged as they were in the matter, he would have sacrificed, if the favour thereby accorded to Mr. Bannister were so great as to be measured by two hundred pounds; but he had passed his word; and he concluded by beseeching Dale not to tempt him above that which he was able.

"Take it away, take it away, sir," he said, when Dale held a pocket-book before his longing eyes. "It ain't right, sir, it ain't indeed—and me a family man."

Dale began to feel the guilt of the Tempter, and fell back on an appeal to the Alderman's better feelings. This line of argument elicited only a smile.

"If I won't do it for two hundred sovereigns, does it stand to reason, sir, as I should do it to obleege?"

Dale left him, after a plain statement of the estimation in which he held him, and went home, yielding only after a struggle to Philip's representation that any attempt to bribe the sandwich-men



## “NO MORE KINGS”

must result in his own greater humiliation and discomfiture.

Angry as Dale was, he determined not to allow this incident to turn him from the course he had marked out for himself. It confirmed his determination to have nothing to do with Sir Harry's Radical song, but it did not make him any the more inclined to appear as a eulogist of royalty. Neutrality in all political matters was his chosen course, and it appeared to him to be incomparably the wisest under all the circumstances. This view he expressed to the family at the Grange, having walked over for that purpose. He expected to meet with some opposition, but to his surprise the Squire heartily acquiesced.

“After this scandalous business,” he said, “you must cut the Radicals altogether. Of course, Harry Fulmer will object to it as much as we do, but he must be responsible for his followers. And I think you're quite right to let us alone too. Why should you literary men bother with politics?”

Dale was delighted at this opinion, and at Janet's concurrence with it.

“Then I daresay you will be so kind as to express my feelings to Lord Cransford; if he thinks fit, he can let the Duke know them.”

The Squire's face expressed surprise, and his daughter's reflected it.

“But, my dear fellow,” said Mr. Delane, “what has Cransford's suggestion to do with politics? The throne is above politics.”

“Surely, Mr. Bannister,” added Janet, “we are all loyal, whatever our politics? I'm sure Sir Harry himself is as loyal as papa.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“Come, Bannister, you press your scruples too far. There are no politics in this.”

Dale was staggered, but not convinced.

“I’d rather not put myself forward at all,” he said.

The Squire assumed an air of apologetic friendliness.

“I know you’ll excuse me, Bannister. I’m twice your age or more, and I—well—I haven’t been so lucky as you in escaping the world of etiquette. But, my dear fellow, when the Duke sends a message,—it really comes to that,—it’s a strongish thing to say you won’t do it. Oh, of course, you can if you like—there’s no beheading now-a-days; but it’s not very usual.”

“I wish Lord Cransford had never mentioned me to the Duke at all.”

“Perhaps it would have been wiser,” the Squire conceded candidly, “but Cransford is so proud of anything that brings *kudos* to the county, and he could no more leave you out than he could the Institute itself. Well, we mustn’t force you. Think it over, think it over. I must be off. No, don’t you go. Stay and have tea with the ladies;” and the Squire, who, as has been previously mentioned, was no fool, left his daughter to entertain his guest.

Janet was working at a piece of embroidery, and she went on working in silence for a minute or two. Then she looked up and said,

“Tora Smith was here this morning. She’ll be very disappointed at your refusal to write for her meeting.”

“Miss Smith has no claim on me,” said Dale stiffly. He had not forgotten Tora’s injurious sus-



## “NO MORE KINGS”

pitions. “Besides, one doesn’t do such things simply for the asking—not even if it’s a lady who asks.”

“You know, I don’t think anybody ought to ask—no, not princes; and I hope you won’t do what Lord Cransford wants merely because you’re asked.”

“Your father says I ought.”

“Papa wants you to do it very much.”

“And I should like to do what he wants.”

“I should like you to do what he wants, but not because he wants it,” said Janet.

Dale turned round to her and said abruptly,

“I’ll do it, if you want me to.”

Now this was flattering, and Janet could not deny that it gave her pleasure; but she clung to her principles.

“I don’t want it—in that sense,” she answered. “I should be glad if it seemed to you a right thing to do; but I should be sorry if you did it, unless it did.”

“You will not let me do it for you?”

“No,” she answered, smiling.

“You have no pleasure in obedience?”

“Oh, well, only in willing obedience,” said she, with a smile.

“It would be very willing—even eager.”

“The motive would not be right. But how absurd! I believe——”

“Well, what?”

“That you mean to do it, and are trying to kill two birds with one stone.”

“You don’t really think that, Miss Delane?”

“No, of course not. Only you were becoming so serious.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“ May I not be serious ? ”

“ It isn't serious to offer to take important steps, because it would please a girl.”

“ Aren't you rather contradicting yourself? You called that becoming serious just now.”

“ If I am, it is a privilege we all have.”

“ Girls, you mean? Well, you refuse to help me? ”

“ Entirely.”

“ Even to counteract Miss Smith's illicit influence? ”

“ I shall trust to your own sense of propriety.”

Dale walked home, grievously puzzled. A small matter may raise a great issue, and he felt, perhaps without full reason, that he was at the parting of the ways. “ No more Kings! No more Priests! ” Or, “ An Ode to H.R.H. the Duke of Mercia on his visit to Denborough ”! Dale ruefully admitted that there would be ground for a charge of inconsistency. Some would talk of conversion, some of tergiversation: he could not make up his mind which accusation would be the more odious. There was clearly nothing for it but absolute neutrality; he must refuse both requests. Janet would understand why: of course she would, she must; and even if she did not, what was that to him? The throne above politics!—that must be a mere sophism; there could not be anything in that. No doubt this young Prince was not morally responsible for the evils, but he personified the system, and Dale could not bow the knee before him. If it had been possible—and as he went, he began idly to frame words for an ode of welcome. An idea or two, a very happy turn, came into his head; he knew exactly the tone to take, just how far to go,



## “NO MORE KINGS”

just the mean that reconciles deference to independence. He had the whole thing mapped out, before he recalled to himself the thought that he was not going to write it at all, and as he entered his own garden, he sighed at the necessary relinquishing of a stately couplet. There was no doubt that work of that class opened a new field, a hitherto virgin soil, to his genius. It was a great pity.

In the garden, to his surprise, he came on Arthur Angell. “What brings you here, Arthur?” he said. “Delighted to see you, though.”

Arthur explained that he had run down at Nellie Fane’s bidding. Nellie had written her letter of warning about the Doctor’s conspiracy, but, having thus relieved her mind, had straightway forgotten all about her letter, and it had lain unposted in her pocket for a week. Then she found it, and sent Arthur off in haste to stop the mischief.

“It’s awfully kind of Nellie,” said Dale; “but I don’t suppose it would have been of any use, and anyhow, it’s too late now.”

“Yes, so Phil told me.”

“A dirty trick, isn’t it?”

“Well, I suppose it’s rather rough on you,” said Arthur, struggling between principles and friendship, and entirely suppressing his own privity to the said dirty trick.

“You’ll stay?”

“I’ve got no clothes.”

“Oh, Wilson will see to that. Come in.”

Philip met them at the door.

“I’ve a message for you, Dale,” he said. “The Mayor has been here.”

“And what may the Mayor want?”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“The Mayor came as an ambassador. He bore a resolution from the Town Council, a unanimous resolution (*absente* Johnstone owing to pressure in the bookselling trade), begging you to accede to the Lord-Lieutenant’s request and write a poem for the Duke.”

“Hang the Town Council!” exclaimed Dale.  
“I wonder why nobody will let me alone!”

Then he remembered that Miss Delane had been almost ostentatious in her determination to let him alone. If he wrote, they could not say that he had written to please her. But he was not going to write. True, it would have been a good revenge on the Doctor, and it would have pleased—

“Shall you do the ode?” asked Philip Hume.

“Certainly not,” answered Dale in a resolute tone.



## CHAPTER XVII

### DALE TRIES HIS HAND AT AN ODE

DALE's preoccupations with his new friends had thrown on Philip Hume the necessity of seeking society for himself, if he did not wish to spend many solitary evenings at Littlehill. The resources of Denborough were not very great, and his dissipation generally took the form of a quiet dinner, followed by a rubber of whist, at Mount Pleasant. The Colonel and he suited one another, and, even if Philip had been less congenial in temper, the Colonel was often too hard put to it for a fourth player, to be nice in scrutinising the attractions of any one who could be trusted to answer a call and appreciate the strategy of a long suit. Even with Philip's help the rubber was not a brilliant one: for Tora only played out of filial duty, and Sir Harry came in to join, because it was better to be with Tora over a whist-table than not to be with her at all. That he thought so witnessed the intensity of his devotion, for to play whist seemed to Sir Harry to be going out of one's way to seek trouble and perplexity of mind.

On the evening of Arthur Angell's arrival, the usual party had dined together and set to work. Things were not going well. At dinner they had discussed the royal visit, and the Colonel had been disgusted to find that his daughter, unmindful of her, or rather his, principles, was eager to see and, if it might be, to speak with "this young whipper-



## A CHANGE OF AIR

snapper of a Prince." The Colonel could not understand such a state of feeling, but Tora was firm. All the county would be there in new frocks: she had ordered a new frock, of which she expected great things, and she meant to be there in it: it would not do, she added, for the Duke to think that the Radicals had no pretty girls on their side. The Colonel impatiently turned to Sir Harry; but Sir Harry agreed with Tora, and even Philip Hume announced his intention of walking down High Street to see, not the Prince of course, but the people and the humours of the day.

"Really, Colonel," he said, "I cannot miss the Mayor."

"Are we going to have a rubber or not?" asked the Colonel, with an air of patient weariness.

They sat down, Sir Harry being his host's partner. Now, Sir Harry was, and felt himself to be, in high favour, owing to his sound views on the question of the day, and he was thinking of anything in the world rather than the fall of the cards. Consequently, his play was marked by somewhat more than its ordinary atrociousness, and the Colonel grew redder and redder as every scheme he cherished was nipped in the bud by his partner's blunders. Tora and Philip held all the cards, and their good fortune covered Tora's deficiency in skill, and made Philip's sound game seem a brilliant one.

At last the Colonel could bear it no longer. He broke up the party, and challenged Philip to a game of piquet.

"At any rate one hasn't a partner at piquet," he said.

Sir Harry smiled, and followed Tora to the



## DALE TRIES HIS HAND AT AN ODE

drawing-room. With such rewards for bad play, who would play well? He sat down by her and watched her making spills. Presently he began to make spills too. Tora looked at him. Sir Harry made a very bad spill indeed, and held it up with a sigh.

"That's the sort of thing," he said, "I have to light my pipe with at home!"

"As you've been very good to-night," answered Tora, "I'll give you some of mine to take with you. Let me show you how to do them for yourself."

Then ensued trivialities which bear happening better than they do recording, glances, and touches, and affectations of stupidity on one side and impatience on the other, till love's ushers, their part fulfilled, stand by to let their master speak, and the hidden seriousness, which made the trifles not trifling, leaps to sudden light. Before her lover's eager rush of words, his glorifying of her, his self-depreciation, Tora was defenceless, her raillery was gone, and she murmured nothing but—

"You're *not* stupid—you're *not* dull. Oh, how can you!"

Before he set out for home, Philip Hume was privileged to hear the fortunate issue, and to wonder how much happiness two faces can manage to proclaim. Kindly as the little family party took him into their confidence, he hastened away, knowing that he had no place there. Such joys were not for him, he thought, as he walked slowly from the door, remembering how once he had challenged impossibility, and laid his love at a girl's feet; and she too had for a moment forgotten impossibility: and they were very happy—for a moment; then



## A CHANGE OF AIR

they recollected—or had it recollected for them—that they were victims of civilisation. And hence an end. Philip recalled this incident as he walked; he had not thought of it for a long time, but the air of Denborough seemed so full of love and love-making, that he spared a sigh or two for himself. Well-born and well-educated, he wrung from the world, by painful labour, some three or four hundred pounds a year. It was enough if he had not been well-born or well-educated; but his advantages turned to disabilities, and he saw youth going or gone, and the home and the love which had been so confidently assumed as his lot, that even as a boy he had joked and been joked about them, faded away from his picture of the future, and he was only kept from a sigh of self-pity by reminding himself of the ludicrous commonplaceness of his grievance against fate. He knew men so situated by dozens, and nobody thought them ill-used. No more they were, he supposed; at least, it seemed nobody's fault, and, in view of sundry other sad things in the world, not a matter to make a fuss about.

He found Dale in high spirits: for Dale had conceived a benevolent scheme, by which he was to make two of his friends happy—as happy as Tora Smith and Harry Fulmer, the news of whom he heard with the distant interest to which Tora's bygone hostility restricted him. He and Arthur Angell had dined together, smoked together, and drunk whisky and water together, and the flood-gates of confidence had been opened; a thing prone to occur under such circumstances, a thing that seems then very natural, and reserves any appearance of strangeness for next morning's cold med-



## DALE TRIES HIS HAND AT AN ODE

itations. Dale had chanted Janet's charms, and Arthur had been emboldened to an antistrophe in praise of Nellie Fane. It was a revelation to Dale—a delightful revelation. It would be ideally suitable, and it was his pleasure that the happy issue should be forwarded by all legitimate means.

"Arthur's going to stay," he said; "and I've written to Nellie to tell her to come down with her mother."

"Ah!"

"Of course, I've said nothing about Arthur. I've put it on the royal visit. She'd like to be here for that anyhow; and when she's here, Arthur must look out for himself."

"Why couldn't he do it in London? They live on the same pair of stairs," objected Philip.

"Oh, London! who the deuce could make love in London?" asked Dale in narrow-minded ignorance. "People's faces are always dirty in London."

Philip smiled, but this new plan seemed to him a bad one. It was one of Dale's graces to be unconscious of most of his triumphs, and it had evidently never struck him that Nellie's affections would offer any obstacle to the scheme, or cause her fatally to misinterpret what the scheme was.

"I don't see," said Philip, "that she is more likely to be captivated by our young friend here than in London."

"My dear fellow, he's at work there, and so is she. Here they'll have nothing else to do."

While Dale chattered over his great idea, Philip pondered whether to interfere or not. He was certain that Nellie had been fond, not of Arthur Angell, but of Dale himself; he feared she would



## A CHANGE OF AIR

think her invitation came from Dale's own heart, not in favour to a friend, and he suspected the kindness would end in pain. But, on the other hand, affections change, and there is such a thing as falling back on the good, when the better is out of reach; and, finally, there is a sound general principle that where it is doubtful whether to hold one's tongue or not, one's tongue should be held. Philip held his.

He shrugged his shoulders and said,

"If this goes on, a bachelor won't be safe in Denborough. What have you been doing?" and he pointed at some scribbling which lay on the table.

Dale flushed a little.

"Oh, I've just been trying my hand at that little thing they want me to do—you know."

"For the Radical meeting?"

"No, no. For the Duke of Mercia's visit."

"Oh! So you're going to do it?"

Dale assumed a candid yet judicial air.

"If I find I can say anything gracious and becoming, without going back on my principles, Phil, I think I shall. Otherwise not."

"I see, old fellow. Think you will be able?"

"I don't intend to budge an inch from my true position for anybody."

"Don't be too hard on the Duke. He's a young man."

Dale became suspicious that he was being treated with levity; he looked annoyed, and Philip hastened to add,

"My dear boy, write your poem, and never mind what people tell you about your principles. Why shouldn't you write some verses to the young man?"

"That's what I say," replied Dale eagerly. "It



## DALE TRIES HIS HAND AT AN ODE

doesn't compromise me in the least. I think you're quite right, Phil."

And he sat down again with a radiant expression.

Philip lit his pipe, and drew his chair near the fire, listening idly to the light scratchings of the writing and the heavy scratchings of the erasures.

"You seem to scratch out a lot, Dale," he remarked.

"A thing's no good," said Dale, without turning round, "till you've scratched it all out twice at least."

"It's a pity, then," said Philip, pulling at his pipe and looking into the fire, "that we aren't allowed to treat life like that."

His words struck a chord in Dale's memory. He started up, and repeated—

"The moving Finger writes, and having writ  
Moves on, nor all your piety nor wit  
Can lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

"And yet," said Philip, stretching out a hand to the flickering blaze, "we go on being pious and wise—some of us; and we go on crying—all of us."



## CHAPTER XVIII

### DELILAH JOHNSTONE

WHEN it became known to Mr. Delane that the ode of welcome would be forthcoming, a fact which, without being definitely announced, presently made its way into general knowledge, he felt that he owed Dale Bannister a good turn. The young man was obviously annoyed and hurt at the aspect of Alderman Johnstone's window, and the Squire could not, moreover, conceal from himself that the parade of the Alderman's sandwich-men on the day of the royal visit would detract from the unanimity of loyalty and contentment with Queen and Constitution which he felt Denborough ought to display. Finally, his wife and his daughter were so strongly of opinion that something must be done, that he had no alternative but to try to do something. Intimidation had failed: the Alderman entrenched himself behind his lease; and Colonel Smith's open triumph was hardly needed to show the Squire that in this matter he had been caught napping. Bribery of a direct and pecuniary sort was apparently also of no avail, and the Squire was driven to play his last card at the cost of great violence to his own feelings. A week before the great day, he sent for the Mayor and was closeted with him for half an hour. The Mayor came out from the conference with an important air, and, on his way home, stopped at Alderman Johnstone's door. The poems, placards, and posters were still prominently



## DELILAH JOHNSTONE

displayed, and over the way, James Roberts, in his well-worn coat, paced up and down on his unwearying patrol. He would wait days rather than miss Dale, in case the poet might chance to pass that way. He had nothing to do, for no one sent for him now. He had no money, and could earn none : therefore his time was his own, and he chose to spend it thus ; forgetting his wife and his child, forgetting even to ask how it happened that there was still food and fuel in his house, or to suspect what made him so often see Philip Hume walk past with an inquiring gaze, indifferently concealed, and so often meet Dale's servant, Wilson, carrying baskets up and down the street on his way to and from Littlehill.

The Mayor went in and fell into conversation with Johnstone. He spoke of the glories of the coming day, of his own new gown, and of Mrs. Hedger's ; and as he raised his voice in enthusiastic description, Mrs. Johnstone stole in from the back parlour and stood within the door. The Alderman affected scorn of the whole affair, and chuckled maliciously when the Mayor referred to Dale Ban-nister.

"Then," said the Mayor, "after the Institoot's opened, there's a grand luncheon at the Grange, with the Duke, and his Lordship, and the Squire, and all."

He paused: the Alderman whistled indifferently, and his wife drew a step nearer. The Mayor proceeded, bringing his finest rhetoric into play.

"The Crown," he said, "the County, and the Town will be represented."

"What, are you going, Hedger?" asked the Alderman with an incredulous laugh.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"The Squire and Mrs. Delane are so good as to make a point of me and Mrs. Hedger attendin'—in state, Johnstone."

"My!" said Mrs. Johnstone, moving a step within the door. "That'll be a day for Susan."

"His Lordship gives Susan his arm," said the Mayor.

"Ain't there any more going from the town?" asked Mrs. Johnstone, while the Alderman ostentatiously occupied himself with one of his posters.

"The Squire," replied the Mayor, "did want another,—there's no room but for two,—but he thinks there's no one of sufficient standin'—not as would go."

"Well, I'm sure!" said Mrs. Johnstone.

"You see, ma'am," pursued the Mayor, "we must consider the lady. The lady must be asked. Now would *you* ask Mrs. Maggs, or Mrs. Jenks, or Mrs. Capper, or any o' that lot, ma'am?"

"Sakes, no!" said Mrs. Johnstone scornfully.

"'There is a lady,' I says to the Squire, 'as would do honour to the town, but there—the man's wrong there!'"

Mrs. Johnstone came nearer still, glancing at her husband.

"When I mentioned the party I was thinkin' of," the Mayor went on, "the Squire slapped his thigh, and, says he, 'The very man we want, Hedger,' he says: 'all parties ought to be represented. He's a Liberal—a prominent Liberal—so much the better. Now, won't he come?' 'Well,' says I, 'he's an obstinate man;' and Mrs. Delane says, 'You must try, Mr. Mayor. Say what pleasure it 'ud give me to see him and Mrs. Johnstone—' There, I've let it out!"



## DELILAH JOHNSTONE

A pause followed. The Mayor drew a card from his pocket. It was headed "To have the honour of meeting H.R.H. the Duke of Mercia." The Mayor laid it on the counter.

"There!" he said. "You must do as you think right, Johnstone. Of course, if you like to go on like this, worryin' the Squire's friends, why, it isn't for you to put your legs under the Squire's ma'og-any. So the Squire says. He says, 'Let him drop that nonsense, and come and be friendly—he may think what he likes.'"

There was another pause.

"There'll have been nothin' like it in my day," said the Mayor. "And only me and Susan from the town!"

"There'll be plenty ready to go," said Johnstone.

"Ay, that there will, but they won't have the askin'. Mrs. Delane says there ain't a soul she'll have, except me and Susan, and you and Mrs. Johnstone. You see, ma'am, it isn't every one who can sit down with the county."

The heart of Mrs. Johnstone was alight with pride and exultation and longing. She looked at her husband and she looked at the Mayor.

"You and me and the Recorder 'ud drive up in the coach," said the Mayor, with the air of one who regretfully pictures an impossible ideal; "and the ladies—Mrs. Hedger and you, ma'am—was to follow in a carriage and pair with a postillion—his Lordship 'ud send one for ye."

"I'd wear my ruby velvet," murmured Mrs. Johnstone in the voice of soliloquy, "and my gold earrings."

"Well, I must be goin'," said the Mayor. "It's



## A CHANGE OF AIR

a cryin' shame you won't come, Johnstone. What's that mad feller Roberts to you?"

"A dirty villain as starves his wife!" ejaculated Mrs. Johnstone, with sudden violence.

The Alderman looked up with a start.

"Take a day to think it over," said the Mayor. "Take a day, ma'am;" and he disappeared with a smile on his shrewd, good-tempered face.

There was silence for a moment after he went. The Alderman sat in his chair, glancing at his wife out of the corner of his eye. Mrs. Johnstone gazed fixedly at the shop-window. The Alderman looked at her again: she was, he thought (with much justice), a fine woman; she would look well in the ruby velvet and the gold earrings, and the swells would wonder where old Johnstone picked up that strapping young woman—for she was his junior by twenty years. The Alderman sighed, and looked down again at his poster.

Presently Mrs. Johnstone stole quietly towards the window, the Alderman covertly watching her. When she reached it, she threw a coquettish glance over her shoulder at her elderly husband: did she not know, as well as he, that she was a fine young woman?

Then she began to take Dale Bannister's books out of their place, piling them behind the counter, and to tear down the bills and placards. The Alderman sat and watched her, till she had finished her task. Then he rose and thundered,

"Put them things back, Sally. Do you 'ear *me*? I ain't going to be made a fool of."

Probably Mrs. Johnstone was not so sure. She burst into tears and flung her arms round the Alderman's neck.



## DELILAH JOHNSTONE

“There! what’s there to cry about?” said he, drawing her on to his knee.

While the Mayor was still in the shop, James Roberts had gone home to his mid-day meal. He ate it with good appetite, not knowing who had paid for it, and not noticing his wife’s terror lest he should ask her. After the meal, he went to his study and read some of Dale’s poetry, declaiming it loudly and with fury, while Ethel listened with the horror that had begun to gain on her increasing and increasing as she listened. She was afraid of him now—afraid most for him, but also for the child and herself; and she thanked Heaven every time he went out peacefully, and again when he came back unhurt.

It was about four when the Doctor took his hat and walked down the street to resume his patrol. To his amazement, the window was bare, the books gone, the placards and posters all torn down. With an oath he rushed into the shop, and found the Alderman sitting behind a pile of volumes, on the top of which lay an envelope addressed to himself.

“What’s the meaning of this?” gasped the Doctor, and as he spoke the glass door which led to the parlour opened a little way.

“It means, Doctor, that I’ve had enough of it.”

“Enough of it?”

“Yes. Mr. Bannister ain’t done me any ’arm, and I’m not going to fret him any more.”

“You scoundrel!” shrieked the maddened man; “you thief! you took my money—you——”

“There’s your books, and there in the envelope you’ll find your ’undred pound. Take ’em and get out.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"So Bannister has been at you?" sneered Roberts.

"I ain't seen 'im."

"Ah!"

He was quiet now, the cold fit was on him. He took no notice of the books, but put the envelope in his pocket and turned to go, saying,

"You think you can stop my revenge, you pitiful fool; you'll see."

Johnstone gave himself a shake.

"I'm well out of that," he said. "I b'lieve he's crazy. Sally, where are you?"

Sally came, and no doubt the Alderman gained the reward of the righteous, in whose house there is peace.

When the Squire received an acceptance of his invitation from Alderman and Mrs. Johnstone he became more than ever convinced that every Radical was at heart a snob. Perhaps it would have been fair to remember that most of them are husbands. Be that as it may, his scheme had worked. The posters, the books, and the sandwich-men were gone. There was nothing now to remind Denborough that it harboured a revolutionist. What was more important still, there was nothing to remind Dale Bannister of the indiscretions of his past. He might now read his ode, unblushing, in High Street, and no placard would scream in ill-omened reminder—"No more Kings!"



## CHAPTER XIX

### A WELL-PAID POEM

AMONG the quieter satisfactions of life must be ranked in a high place the peace of a man who has made up his mind. He is no longer weighing perplexing possibilities, but, having chosen his path, feels that he has done all that can be done, and that this conviction will enable him to bear with patience the outcome of his determination, whatever it may be. Of course he is wrong, and if misfortune comes, his philosophy will go to the wall, but for the moment it seems as if fate cannot harm him, because he has set his course and bidden defiance to it.

Dale had made up his mind to disregard cavillers, not to write the Radical ditty, to write the ode of welcome, and, lastly, to follow whither his inclination led. And, on the top of these comforting resolutions came the removal of his thorn in the flesh—Johnstone's be-placarded shop-window—and the glow of well-rewarded benevolence with which he had witnessed Nellie Fane's ill-concealed delight in her return to Littlehill and Arthur Angell's openly declared pleasure in greeting her. Dale began to think that he had too easily allowed himself to be put out, and had been false to his poetic temperament by taking trifles hardly. He was jocund as he walked, and nature responded to his mood: the sun shone bright and warm on him, and the spring air was laden with pleasant hints of coming sum-



## A CHANGE OF AIR

mer. He wondered how and why, a few weeks ago, he had nearly bidden a disgusted farewell to Market Denborough.

Now, when a man sets out in such a mood, being a young man, and a man, as they used to say, of sensibility, next to anything may happen. From his contented meditations on the happy arrangement he had made for his friends, Dale's thoughts travelled on to his own affairs. He was going to the Grange,—he was always going to the Grange now, and he seemed always welcome there. Mrs. Delane was kind, the Squire was effusive, and Janet— Here his thoughts became impossible to record in lowly prose. The goddess had become flesh for him; still stately and almost severe in her maiden reserve to all others, as she had once been to him, now for him she smiled and blushed, and would look, and look away, and look again, and vainly summon her tamed pride to hide what her delight proclaimed. It was sudden. Oh yes; anything worth having was sudden, thought lucky Dale. Fame had been sudden, wealth had been sudden. Should not love be sudden too?

“If I get a chance—” said Dale to himself, and he smiled and struck at the weeds with his stick, and hummed a tune. Anything might happen.

The Prince was due in three days, and already flags and triumphal arches were beginning to appear. It is to be hoped that the demand for drugs was small, for Mr. Hedger was to be found everywhere but behind his own counter, and Alderman Johnstone, having once taken the plunge, was hardly less active in superintending the preparations. The men who had carried those obnoxious



## A WELL-PAID POEM

boards were now more worthily earning their bread by driving in posts and nailing up banners, and Dale saw that Denborough was in earnest, and meant to make the reception a notable testimony to its loyalty. He loitered to watch the stir for a little while, for it was early afternoon, and he must not arrive at the Grange too soon. Not even the ode itself, which he carried in his pocket, could excuse an intrusion on the Squire's mid-day repose. As he stood looking on, he was accosted by Dr. Spink.

"I have just been to see Roberts," he said.

"Is he ill?"

"Yes. His wife sent for me. As you may suppose, she would not have done so for nothing."

"What's the matter?"

"I don't like his state at all. He took no notice of me, but lay on his bed, muttering to himself. I think he's a little touched here;" and the doctor put a finger just under the brim of his well-brushed hat.

"Poor chap!" said Dale. "I should like to go and see him."

Spink discouraged any such idea.

"You're the very last person he ought to see. I want him to go away."

"Has he got any money?"

"Yes, I think so. His wife told me he had now."

"And won't he go?"

"He says he must stay till after the 15th" (the 15th was the great day), "and then he will go. That's the only word I could get out of him. I told his wife to let me know at once if there was any change for the worse."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“It’s hard on her, poor little woman,” said Dale, passing on his way.

He found Tora Smith and Sir Harry at the Grange. Rather to his surprise, Tora greeted him with friendly cordiality, accepting his congratulations very pleasantly. He had expected her to show some resentment at his refusal to write a song for her, but in Tora’s mind, songs and poets, Liberal meetings, and even royal visits, had been, for the time at least, relegated to a distant background of entire unimportance. Captain Ripley was there also, with the ill-used air that he could not conceal, although he was conscious that it only aggravated his bad fortune. He took his leave a very few minutes after Dale arrived; for what pleasure was there in looking on while everybody purred over Dale, and told him his ode was the most magnificent tribute ever paid to a youthful Prince? Dale, in his heart, thought the same,—so does a man love what he creates,—but he bore his compliments with a graceful outward modesty.

The afternoon was so unseasonably fine—such was the reason given—that Janet and he found themselves walking in the garden, she talking merrily of their preparations, he watching her fine, clear-cut profile, and, as she turned to him in talk, the gay dancing of her eyes.

“Your doing it,” she said, “just makes the whole thing perfect. How can we thank you enough, Mr. Bannister?”

“The Captain did not seem to care about my verses,” Dale remarked, with a smile.

Janet blushed a little, and gave him a sudden glance—a glance that was a whole book of confidences, telling what she never could have told in



## A WELL-PAID POEM

words, what she never would have told at all, did not the eyes sometimes outrun their mandate and speak unbidden of the brain.

Dale smiled again—this time in triumph.

“You like them?” he asked softly, caressing the little words with his musical, lingering tones.

“Oh yes, yes,” she said, looking at him once more for a moment, and then hastily away.

“I’ll write you a volume twice as good, if—I may.”

“Twice as good?” she echoed, with a laugh. “Now, honestly, don’t you think these perfect yourself?”

“They are good—better than any I wrote before”—he paused to watch her face, and went on in a lower voice—“I knew you; but I shall do better, the more I know you and the better.”

Janet had no light answer ready now. Her heart was beating, and she had much ado not to bid him end her sweet, unbearable excitement.

They had reached the end of the terrace and passed into the wood that skirted it to the west. Suddenly she made a movement as if to turn and go back.

“No, no,” he whispered in her ear; and as she wavered, he caught her by the arm, and, without words of asking or of doubt, drew her to him and kissed her.

“My beauty, my queen, my love!” he whispered. “You love me, you love me!”

She drew back her head, straightening the white column of her neck, while her hands held his shoulders. “Ah, I would die for you!” she said.

Mrs. Delane was a woman of penetration. Though Janet told her nothing of what had oc-



## A CHANGE OF AIR

curred,—for she and Dale agreed to let the matter remain a secret till the impending festivities were over,—yet Mrs. Delane saw something in her daughter's air which made her that same evening express to the Squire her doleful conviction that the worst had happened.

“I shall say nothing to Janet,” she said, “till she speaks to me. I can trust her absolutely. But I am afraid of it, George. Poor Gerard Ripley!”

“My dear, I'm not going to break my heart about Gerard Ripley. I think more of Jan.”

“Well, of course, so do I. And I don't at all like it. He's not—well, not our *sort*, as the young people say.”

“Mary, you're talking slang. What's the matter with him? The match will make Jan famous.”

“Well, well, I don't like it, but you must have your way.”

“It's not my way. It's Jan's way. Is she fond of him?”

“Terribly, I'm afraid, poor child!”

The Squire became a little irritated at this persistently sorrowful point of view.

“Really, my dear, why shouldn't she be fond of him? It's not a bad thing when people are going to marry.”

“I wish I'd seen it in time to stop it.”

“On the whole, Mary, I'm rather glad you didn't. I like the young fellow.”

In this state of things—with the lady eagerly consenting, and a father all but ready to urge her on—well might Captain Ripley ride recklessly home from Dirkham Grange, cursing the ways of women and the folly of men, and promising himself to go to India and there be killed, to the end



## A WELL-PAID POEM

that his tragic fate might bring a pang to Janet's heart in future days. Well might he discover a sudden recall, and return to his regiment, escaping the Denborough celebrations, and risking offence in exalted quarters. So he went; and nobody at Denborough thought any more about him—not even Janet, for joy swallows up pity, and the best of humanity are allowed, without reproach, to be selfish once or twice in life.

That same night, at dinner at Littlehill, Nellie Fane thought Dale had never been so bright, so brilliant, or so merry. Under his leadership, the fun and mirth waxed fast and furious, till it carried away her doubts and fears, and Angell's sore wonderings why she looked always at Dale and never at him, and Philip's troubled forebodings of sorrows no friendly hand could avert. Dale's high spirits bore no check and suffered no resistance, and there was a tumult in Littlehill, such as had not been heard since its early indecorous days.

Suddenly, into this scene, followed hastily by Wilson, there broke, hatless and cloakless, Ethel Roberts, her face pale and her eyes wide with fear. Running to Philip Hume, she cried,

“My husband! He has gone, he has gone! We cannot find him. He has gone, and taken the pistol with him. What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?”



## CHAPTER XX

### AN EVENING'S END

THE next morning, Roberts' friends held an anxious conference. The Doctor, being left alone while his wife went out on household affairs, had, it seemed, risen from bed, dressed himself, and left the house. He had taken a few pounds, part of what Johnstone had returned to him, but no luggage. Nothing was gone, except his revolver, which had lain on the mantelpiece, his wife having feared to take it away. In the absence of other explanation, it seemed most probable that he had suddenly determined to return to London, and Dr. Spink thought London the best place to look for him. Accordingly, Philip Hume at once started in pursuit; for all felt, though none of them liked to express the feeling, that Roberts was not in a state in which he could safely be trusted to look after himself. His wife was helpless with grief and bewilderment, and kindly Mrs. Hodge determined to spend the day with her, and return to Littlehill only late in the evening: thus at least proper attention would be secured to the helpless child and its hardly less helpless mother.

Not even these troubles could keep Dale from the Grange, and after dinner, with an apology to Nellie and Arthur, he announced his intention of strolling over, to ask the Squire at what point in the proceedings his ode was to come. Nellie had a letter to write, or said she had, and Arthur An-



## AN EVENING'S END

gell offered to bear Dale company part of the way, with a cigar.

The two men set out together, and Arthur did not leave his friend till they were at the Grange drive. Then he sauntered back, humming snatches of song between his puffs of smoke, and rejoicing in the glory of a full moon. He had almost reached the gate of Littlehill, when, to his surprise, he saw, a few yards from him, a figure that seemed familiar. He caught sight of it only for a moment, for the trees then came between; and yet he felt almost sure that the stealthily-moving form was that of James Roberts. He stood watching to see him again, but he did not; and, going into the house, he told Nellie what he thought he had seen.

"Dr. Roberts going towards the Grange!" she exclaimed. "You must be mistaken."

"I don't think so. It looked like him."

Nellie was not inclined to think he could be right, but she agreed that Arthur had better go and tell Dr. Spink of his suspicions. Arthur went off on his errand, and she sat by the fire alone.

Abandoning herself to reverie, she idly and sadly reviewed the events of the days since her return. How joyfully she had come! But it had hardly been as good as she hoped. Dale was very kind, when he was there. But why did he leave her so much—leave her to Arthur Angell? And ah, why did he go so much to the Grange? It was all far pleasanter before he came to Denborough, before he knew these great people—yes, and before this Dr. Roberts was there to worry them. The thought of Roberts carried her mind in a new direction. What a strange man he was! And his poor wife! She could not think why he had be-



## A CHANGE OF AIR

come so odd and so unfriendly. Yet it was so. He seemed absolutely to hate Dale : she had seen him look at him so fiercely. Dale had not ruined him ; he had ruined himself. He was mad to blame Dale. Ah, wasn't he mad?—She sat up suddenly in her chair. What if Arthur were right? What if it were he? Why was he going to the Grange? Dale was there. What was that they said about a pistol? Ah—if—

Without another thought she rose, and as she was, in her evening dress and thin shoes, she ran out of the house and along the wooded road towards the Grange. A terrible idea was goading her on. He was mad: he hated Dale: he had a revolver with him. Oh, could she be in time? They would wonder at her. What did that matter? Her love, her lord was—or might be—in danger. She pressed on, till she panted and had to pause; then, with breath but half-recovered, over rough and smooth ground, knowing no difference, she sped on her way.

Dale's talk with the Squire was not long; but the Squire's daughter came to the door to bid him good-night, and was easily persuaded to walk a little way down the drive with him. She went farther than she meant, as was natural enough; for she was leaning on his arm, and he was telling her, in that caressing voice of his, that all his life and heart and brain and power were hers, and lavishing sweet words on her.

"I must go back, Dale," she said. "They will wonder what has become of me."

"Not yet."

"Yes, I must."

"Ah, my darling, how soon will it be when we



## AN EVENING'S END

need never part? How soon? I mean how long, till then! Do you love me?"

"You know, Dale."

"What was it you said the other day?—was it only yesterday?—that you would die for me?"

"Yes."

"Ah, Jan, my sweetest Jan, that you should say that to me!"

They said no more, but did not part yet. At last, he suffered her to tear herself away.

"I shall run back through the shrubbery," she whispered.

"I shall wait."

"Yes, wait. When I get in, I will show you a light from my window. A good-night light, Dale."

She sped away down a side-path, and Dale leant against a tree, in the moonlight, fixing his lovelorn eyes on the window.

As Janet turned down her path, she rushed, in her rapid flight, against a man who stood there in lurking.

Dale's side was to him, but he was watching Dale, with a sneering smile on his lips. When she saw him, she started back. In a moment he seized her shoulder with one hand, and pressed a pistol to her head.

"If you make a sound, I'll kill you," he hissed. "Don't stir—don't scream."

She was paralysed with surprise and fright. It was Roberts, and—what did he mean?

He pushed her slowly before him, the revolver still at her head, till they reached the drive. Dale's eyes were set on his mistress's window, and their feet made no noise on the grass-edges of the drive. Roberts gave a low laugh, and whispered in her ear,



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“He came to see you, did he? The traitor! Not a sound! Wait till he turns! wait till he turns! I want him to see me. When he turns, I shall shoot him.”

At last she understood. The madman meant to kill Dale.

He would kill him, before Dale could defend himself. She must warn him—at any cost, she must warn him. If it cost her——

“Not a sound,” hissed Roberts. “A sound and you are dead—your head blown to bits—blown to bits!” And again he laughed, but noiselessly.

It was her life against his. Ah, she must warn him—she must cry out! But the cold barrel pressed against her temple, and the madman’s voice hissed in her ear—

“Blown to bits—blown to bits!”

She couldn’t die, she couldn’t die!—not like that—not blown to bits! Perhaps he would miss—Dale might escape. She couldn’t die!

He advanced a little nearer, keeping on the grass-edge and pushing her before him, still whispering to her of death and its horrors, if she made a sound. It was too horrible: she could not bear it. Ah! he was measuring the distance. She must cry out! She opened her lips. Quick as thought, he pressed the barrel to her head. She could not, could not do it; and, with a groan, she sank, a senseless heap, on the ground at his feet.

Suddenly a shot rang out, and a woman’s cry. Dale started from his reverie, to see a woman a step or two from him; a woman, tottering, swaying, falling forward on her face, as he rushed to support her in his arms.

There was a shout of men’s voices, and, follow-



## AN EVENING'S END

ing on it, another report, and James Roberts fell beside Janet Delane, his head, as he had said, blown to bits : and two panting men, who had run all the way from Denborough, were raising Janet and looking if she were dead, and then laying her down again and turning to where Nellie Fane lay in lifeless quiet in Dale's arms.

"A minute sooner and we should have been in time," said Arthur Angell to Dr. Spink, as the Doctor pushed Dale aside and knelt over Nellie.

And Dale, relieved, ran at all his speed to where Janet lay and threw himself on his knees beside her.

"My love, open your eyes," he cried.



## CHAPTER XXI

### "THE OTHER GIRL DID"

ON the afternoon of the morrow, Philip Hume, who, summoned by a telegram from Dr. Spink, had come down to Denborough by the first train he could catch, put on his hat, and, lighting his pipe, took a turn up and down the road that ran by Littlehill. Since his coming he had been in the house, and the house had seemed almost to stifle him. He had a man's feeling of uselessness in the face of a sick-room: he could do nothing to help Nellie Fane in her struggle for life; he only hindered the people who could do something. Nor did he succeed much better with those whose ailments were of the mind. Arthur Angell sat in one room, suspecting now that, whether Nellie lived or died, his dearest hopes were dead. Dale, in another room, strode unrestingly to and fro, waiting for Wilson to come back from the messages he kept sending him on, now up-stairs to Nellie's door, now down the town to Ethel Roberts', now, and most often, to the Grange; and always Wilson, his forehead wet and his legs weary, came back and said,

"Please, sir, there is no change."

Once Nellie had been conscious, had asked "Is he safe?" and, receiving her answer, had closed her eyes again. Ethel Roberts was in no danger; the shock would pass. Of Janet there came no news, save that she was alone with her mother, and cried to be alone even from her mother. James Roberts,



## “THE OTHER GIRL DID”

in his frenzy, had indeed wrought havoc, and Philip, as he walked and smoked, vehemently, though silently, cursed the ways of this world.

Presently Mrs. Hodge came out in her bonnet.

“Nellie is well looked after,” she said. “I am going down to see how that poor little Roberts is.”

Philip did not offer to go with the good woman. He watched her heavy figure hastening down the hill, wondering that she seemed almost happy in her busy services of kindness. He could do nothing but fret, and smoke, and try to keep out of the way.

A smart brougham drove up. It stopped by him, and Tora Smith jumped out.

“How is she?” she cried.

“Spink thinks she will pull through,” answered Philip; “but of course she’s in great danger still.”

“May I go to her?” asked Tora.

“She sees no one,” he replied in surprise.

“Oh, I don’t mean to see her. I mean to stay and help—to nurse her, you know.”

“It is very kind of you: she has her mother and a nurse.”

“Oh, won’t you let me?”

“It does not rest with me. But why should you?”

“I—I once thought such horrid things of her. And—wasn’t it splendid?”

Philip looked kindly at her.

“That will please her,” he said, “and her friends.”

“Mayn’t I help?”

“I tell you what: poor Mrs. Roberts has no one but a hired nurse. Mrs. Hodge has run down for a minute, but of course she can’t leave her daughter long.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“ You mean I ought to go to her ? ”

“ One can't even be kind in the way one likes best,” said Philip.

“ Well, I will. But I should have loved to be with Miss Fane. I can't tell you how I feel about her. I think people who think evil things of other people ought to be *beaten*, Mr. Hume.”

“ Doubtless, but justice flags. You can't expect me to beat you, Miss Smith.”

Tora smiled for a minute; then she wiped her eyes again, and asked gravely,

“ Are you never serious ? ”

“ Yes; I am serious now. Go to that poor woman; consider doing that in the light of a beating.”

“ You'll let Miss Fane know I—I—— ? ”

“ Yes; and Dale. What a terrible facer for our celebrations, isn't it ? ”

“ Oh yes. Harry has ridden over to see Lord Cransford about it. Mr. Delane wants the thing put off, if possible.”

“ Can you put off a Prince? But I suppose he'll be only too glad not to be bored with it.”

“ You know Janet is in a dreadful state? Poor girl! It must have been awful for her. The man had hold of her! Well, I shall go. Good-bye. I shall run up here again to-morrow.”

The putting off of the Prince, in spite of Philip's doubt of its constitutional possibility, was managed: for the ceremony could hardly take place without Mr. Delane's presence, as he had been the inspiring force of the whole movement which had resulted in the Institute; and Mr. Delane felt it utterly out of the question for him to take any part in such festivities, in view of the dreadful occurrence in his grounds and of his daughter's serious condition.



## “THE OTHER GIRL DID”

The doctors, indeed, told him that she had stood the shock remarkably well; they would not have been surprised to find her much worse. Her reason was unshaken, and, after the first night anyhow, the horror of the madman's grip and voice had left her. She did not, waking or sleeping,—for she slept sometimes,—dream that she was again in his hands, face to face with death; and Dr. Spink congratulated the Squire and Mrs. Delane on a good prospect of a total recovery. Yet Mrs. Delane and the Squire were not altogether comforted. For Janet lay from morning to evening on her bed, almost motionless and very quiet, whenever any one was in the room. She asked once or twice after her fellow-sufferers, but, except for that, and answering questions, she never spoke but to say,

“I think I could sleep if I were alone.”

Then Mrs. Delane would go away, trying to believe the excuse.

There are not many of us who would feel warranted in being very hard on a man who had failed in such a trial as had befallen Janet Delane: in a woman, failure would seem little other than a necessary consequence of her sex. Death, sudden, violent, and horrible, searches the heart too closely for any one to feel sure that his would be found sound to the core—not risk of death, for that most men will, on good cause and, even more cheerfully, in good company, meet and face. It is certainty that appals; and it had been certain death that had awaited Janet's first cry. And yet she would not be comforted. She had stopped to think how certain it was; then she failed. The mistake was in stopping to think at all. The other girl—the girl he did not love, but who, surely, loved him



## A CHANGE OF AIR

with a love that was love indeed—had not stopped to think whether the bullet could or might or must hit her. She had not cared which: it had been enough for her that it might hit the man she loved, unless she stood between to stop it, and she had stood between. How could Janet excuse her cowardice by telling herself of the certainty of death, when, had she not been a coward, she would never have stayed to know whether death were certain or not? If she ever could have deluded herself like that, what the other girl did made it impossible. The other girl—so she always thought of Nellie—held up a mirror wherein Janet saw her own littleness. And yet he had loved her, not the other; her life belonged to him, the other's did not; she had proclaimed proudly, but an instant before, that she would die for him, and he had praised her for saying it. He would know now what her protestations were worth. He would be amused to think that it was not Janet Delane—the Janet who was always exhorting him to noble thoughts—who was proud in the pride of her race—not she who had dared death for him; but that other, so far beneath her, whom she had not deigned to think a rival. Ah, but why, why had she not called? Surely God would have given her one moment to be glad in, and that would have been enough.

She sat up in bed, the coverings falling from her, and her black hair streaming over her white night-dress. Claspings her hands over her knees, she looked before her out of the window. She could see the tree where Dale had stood and the spot where she had fallen; she could see the fresh red gravel, put down to hide the stains, and the gardener's rake, flung down where he had used it. He



## “THE OTHER GIRL DID”

must have gone to tea—gone to talk it all over with his wife and his friends, to wonder why Miss Janet had not called out, why she had left it to the other girl, why she had fainted, while the other had saved him. They would talk of “poor Miss Janet,” and call the other a “rare plucked ’un”—she knew their way. Nobody would ever call her that—not her father again, who used to boast that Janet, like all his house, feared nothing but dishonour, and would make as good a soldier as the son he had longed for in vain. Her mother had come and called her “a brave girl.” Why did people think there was any good in lies? She meant it kindly, but it was horrible to hear it. Lies are no use. Let them call her a coward, if they wanted to speak the truth. They all thought that. Dale thought it,—Dale, who must be admiring that other girl’s gallantry, and wondering why he had not loved her, instead of loving a girl who talked big, and, when danger came, fainted—and stood by to see him die.

Of course he could not go on loving her after this. He would feel—everybody must feel—that he owed his life to the girl who had saved him, and must give it to her. Very likely he would come and pretend to want her still. He would think it right to do that, though it would really be kinder just to let her drop. She would understand. Nobody knew he had spoken to her; perhaps nobody need: it would not seem so bad to people who did not know she had promised to be his wife. Not that it mattered much what people thought. She knew what she was, and—she must let him go, she must let him go. And here, for the first time, she buried her head in her pillow and sobbed.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

Mrs. Delane came in.

“Why, Janet dearest, you’ve nothing over you! You’ll catch cold. What’s the matter, darling? Are you frightened?”

There it was! Everybody thought she was frightened now.

“There is a message from Mr. Bannister, darling. He wants so much to see you, and the doctor thinks it would do you no harm. Do you think you could dress and see him?”

“He wants to see me?”

“Why, yes, dear. Of course, Jan. I know, my dear.”

“To leave her and come and see me.”

“Miss Fane? Oh, she’s going on very well. There’s no reason he shouldn’t come over here. You would like to see him, Jan?”

“Tell him to go away—tell him to go to her—tell him to leave me alone.”

“But, Jan dearest——”

“Oh, mamma, mamma, do leave me alone!”

Mrs. Delane went and told the messenger that Miss Delane might see no one for a day or two; she was still too agitated. Then she sought her husband and told him of their daughter’s words.

“She must be a little queer still,” said the Squire, with anxiety. “Don’t be worried, Mary. She’s a strong girl, and she’ll soon throw it off.”

But she could not throw it off—not that thought which had burnt into her breast; and all night, by the light of the moon, she sat and looked at the tree and the fresh gravel, the spot where her honour and her love had called on her, and called in vain.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE FITNESS OF THINGS

IF anything could have consoled Market Denborough for the certain postponement and possible loss of the Duke of Mercia's visit, it would have been the cause of these calamities. Its citizens were not more hard-hearted than other people, and they bestowed much sympathy on Nellie Fane, who, out of the competitors, was easily elected the heroine of the incident ; but neither were they more impervious to the charms of excitement, of gossip, and of notoriety. The reporters and the artists, who had been told off to describe and depict the scene of the royal visit, did not abandon their journey, but substituted sketches of the fatal spot, of the Grange, of Littlehill, and of the actors in the tragedy ; while interviews with the Mayor, and anybody else who knew, or knew some one who knew about the circumstances, or professed to do either, amply supplied the place which the pageant and the speeches had been destined to fill. And if the occurrence excited such interest in the great London papers, the broadsheets and columns of the local journals were a sight to behold. The circulation of the *Standard* went up by more than a hundred ; while the *Chronicle* announced, it must be admitted to a somewhat sceptical world, that its weekly issue had exhausted three editions, and could no longer be obtained at the booksellers' or the office. The assertion, however, being untested, passed, and every



## A CHANGE OF AIR

one allowed that young Mingley's detailed account of poor Roberts' last words to Dale Bannister before he fired were perfect in verisimilitude, which, under the regrettable circumstance of Mingley's absence, and of no such words having been uttered, was all that could be expected. Mingley was puffed up, demanded a rise of salary, got it, and married Polly Shipwright, the young lady at the "Delane Arms." So the ill wind blew Mingley good. Yet the editor of the *Chronicle* was not satisfied, and as a further result of Mingley's activity, he inserted an article the following week, in which he referred, with some parade of mystery, to the romantic character of the affair. It was not only in fiction, he remarked, that love had opportunities for displaying itself in heroism, nor, it was to be earnestly hoped, only in the brains of imaginative writers that affection and gratitude found themselves working together towards a joyful consummation. Denborough knew and admired its gifted fellow-townsmen, and Denborough had been a witness of the grace and charm of the young lady who had shed such lustre on her sex. Accordingly, Denborough waited the result with some confidence. Into this personal side of the matter the *Standard* did not try to follow its rival. Mr. Delane controlled the *Standard*, and he forbade any such attempt, on grounds of careful generality. But the article in the *Chronicle* was quite enough; it expressed what every one had been thinking, and very soon the whole town was expecting to hear, simultaneously, that Nellie was out of danger, and that she had given her hand to Dale Bannister. The theory was so strongly and unhesitatingly accepted that the two or three who, mainly out of a



## THE FITNESS OF THINGS

love of paradox, put their heads on one side and asked how Miss Delane came to be out in the garden with Dale Bannister, were pooh-poohed and told that they merely showed their ignorance of the usages of society; whereupon they went home and grumbled to their wives, but were heard no more in public places.

Dale Bannister flung the *Chronicle* down on the table with a muttered oath, asking the eternally-asked, never-to-be-answered question, why people could not mind their own business,—an unjust query in this case, for it is a reporter's business to mind other people's business. He had just come down from his first interview with Nellie. She was mending rapidly, and was now conscious, although any reference to the events of the fatal night was sternly forbidden; he was not even allowed to thank the friend who, happily, had only risked, not lost, her life for him. He had whispered his joy at finding her doing well, and she had pressed his hand in answer; more than that vigilant attendants prevented. Then he had come down-stairs, picked up the *Chronicle* in the hall, read the article, and gone into the smoking-room, where he had found Arthur Angell sitting by the fire, his hands deep in his pockets and his shoulders up to his ears, a picture of woe.

"What infernal nonsense!" said Dale, with a vexed laugh. "Do you see how this fellow disposes of us, Arthur?"

"Yes, I saw," said Arthur gloomily.

"I suppose they're bound to say that. The public loves romance."

"I think it's very natural they should say it. Why did she follow you? Why did she risk her



## A CHANGE OF AIR

life? Why did she ask after you the first moment she was conscious?"

"No one but me was being murdered," suggested Dale, with a rather uneasy smile.

"We left her here. Why did she go out at all? But it's too plain. I saw it before I had been here a day."

"Saw what, man?" asked Dale, passing by Arthur's questionable assertion.

"Why, that Nellie—you know. I don't know what you feel, but I know what she feels. It's rough on me having me down——"

"I never thought of such a thing," said Dale quickly.

"Oh, I suppose not; though how you didn't—I say, now, before you came to Denborough, didn't you?"

"I—I don't think so. We were great friends."

Arthur shook his head, and Dale poked the little bit of fire in an impatient way.

"How damned crooked things go!" he said.

Arthur rose and said in a decided tone,

"Well, I'm out of it. She saved your life, and she's in love with you. It seems to me your duty's pretty plain. You must drop your other fancy."

"My other fancy?" exclaimed Dale in horror. Lived there a man who could call his love for Janet a "fancy"?

"You'd break her heart," said Arthur, who thought of no one but his lady-love in his unselfish devotion.

It crossed Dale's mind to say that the situation seemed to involve the breaking of one heart at least, if Arthur were right; but he thought he had no right to speak of Janet's feelings, well as he



## THE FITNESS OF THINGS

knew them. He threw the poker down with a clang.

"Take care—you'll disturb her," said Arthur.

This annoyed Dale.

"My good fellow," he remarked, "we're not all, except you, entirely indifferent whether she lives or dies. I might throw pokers about all day—and I feel inclined to—without her hearing me in the blue room."

"Oh, I beg pardon," said Arthur, turning to the window and looking out.

He saw a stout man coming up the hill. It was the Mayor of Denborough, and he was evidently making for Littlehill. When he was ushered into the smoking-room, he explained that he had come to ask after Miss Fane's progress.

"The town, Mr. Bannister, sir," he said, "is takin' a great interest in the young lady."

"I am glad to say she has, we think, turned the corner," said Dale.

"That's happy news for all—and you first of all, sir."

The Mayor might merely have meant that Dale's feelings would be most acute, as Nellie had received her wound in his service; but there was a disconcerting twinkle in the Mayor's eye.

"Mrs. Roberts," the Mayor continued, "is doin' first-rate. After all, it's a riddance for her, sir. Have you any news from the Grange?"

"I hear there is no change in Miss Delane. She still suffers from the shock."

"Poor young lady! I hear the Captain's back at the Warren, sir."

"What?"

"Captain Ripley, sir. Back at home."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“ Oh ! ”

The Mayor was bursting with suppressed gossip on this point also, but the atmosphere was most repressive. He looked round in despair for another opening, and his eye fell on Arthur Angell.

“ Seen the *Chronicle*, sir ? ” he asked. “ That Mingley’s a sharp young chap. Still I don’t ’old—hold with all that talk about people. Did you say you’d seen it, sir ? ”

“ Yes, I’ve seen it. It’s mostly lies. ”

“ He, he ! ” chuckled the Mayor. “ You’re right, sir. ”

A long pause ensued before the Mayor very reluctantly took his hat.

“ I hope we shall see Miss Fane about soon, sir ? ” he said.

“ Oh, I hope so. I think so, if nothing goes wrong. ”

“ She must be proud and happy, that young lady, sir. As I said to my daughters, says I, ‘ Now, girls, which of you is goin’ to save your young man’s life ? ’ And my wife, Mrs. Hedger, sir, she put in, ‘ None of you, I’ll be bound, if you don’t—— ’ ”

The anecdote was lost, for Dale interrupted,

“ Let me see you as far as the gate, ” and pushed the Mayor’s walking-stick into his hand.

Having got rid of the Mayor, Dale did not hasten to return to Arthur Angell. At this moment, exasperated as he was, everything about his friend annoyed him—his devotion, his unselfishness, his readiness to accept defeat himself, his indiscreet zeal on behalf of his mistress. His despair for himself, and his exhortation to Dale, joined in manifesting that he neither possessed himself nor could understand in another what a real passion was.



## THE FITNESS OF THINGS

If he did or could, he would never have used that word "fancy." How could people speak of friendship, or gratitude, or both together, as if they were, or were in themselves likely to lead to, love? You did not love a woman because you esteemed her; if you loved her, you might esteem her—or you might not; anyhow, you worshipped her. Yet these peddling Denborough folk were mapping out his course for him. And Arthur Angell croaked about broken hearts.

Suddenly a happy thought struck him, a thought which went far to restore his equanimity. These people, even that excellent Arthur, spoke in ignorance. At the most, they—those who knew anything—supposed that he had a "fancy" for Janet. They had no idea that his love had been offered and accepted, that he was plighted to her by all the bonds of honour and fidelity. This exacting gratitude they harped upon might demand a change of nascent inclinations; it would not require, nor even justify, broken promises, and the flinging back of what a man had asked for and received. Dale's step grew more elastic and his face brighter as he realised that, in reality, on a sane view of the position, duty and pleasure went hand in hand, both pointing to the desired goal, uniting to free him from any such self-sacrifice as Arthur Angell had indicated. If Arthur were right about Nellie's feelings, and if he had been a free man, he might have felt some obligation on him, or at least have chosen, to make the child happy, but as it was—

"I must be just before I'm generous," he said to himself, and added, with a shamefaced laugh, "And I happen to like justice best."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

At this moment a servant in the Grange livery rode up, touching his hat, and handed him a note. It was from Janet, though her writing was so tremulous as to be scarcely recognisable. He tore it open and read—

“You can never wish to see me again, but come once more. It was not quite as bad as it seemed.—J.”

In bewilderment he turned to the man.

“Miss Delane sent this?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Say I’ll come over to the Grange to-morrow morning.”

The man rode off, and Dale stood, fingering and staring at his note.

“What does the dear girl mean?” he asked. “What wasn’t so bad? Why don’t I wish to see her again? Has that ruffian driven her out of her senses?”

When Dr. Spink came that evening, Dale seized the opportunity of sounding him. The Doctor laughed at the idea of any serious mental derangement.

“Miss Delane’s very much upset, of course, very much, but her mind is as right as yours or mine.”

“She’s got no delusions?”

“Oh dear, no. She’s nervous and overstrained, that’s all. She’ll be all right in a few days.”

“Then,” said Dale to himself, as the Doctor bustled off, “all I can say is that I don’t understand women.”



## CHAPTER XXIII

### A MORBID SCRUPLE

MRS. DELANE had ceased to struggle against the inevitable, and she hailed her daughter's desire to see Dale Bannister as an encouraging sign of a return to a normal state of mind. Strange as Janet's demeanour had been since that fearful evening, there could not be anything seriously wrong with her, when her wishes and impulses ran in so natural a channel. Mrs. Delane received Dale with an approach to enthusiasm, and sent him up to the little boudoir where Janet was with an affectionate haste which in itself almost amounted to a recognition of his position.

"You must be gentle with her, please, Mr. Bannister," she said. "She wanted so much to see for herself that you were really alive, that we could not refuse to allow her, but the Doctor is most strict in ordering that she should not be excited."

Dale promised to be careful, and went up-stairs without a word about the strange note he had received; that was a matter between Janet and himself.

Janet was sitting, propped up with cushions, on a low chair, and she waved Dale to a seat near her. When, before sitting down, he came to her and kissed her, she did not repel his caress, but received it silently, again motioning him to the chair. Dale knelt down on the floor beside her.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"How pale you are, poor dear!" he said. "And why do you write me such dreadful things?"

"I wanted," she began in a low voice, "to tell you, Dale, that I did try, that I really did try, to call out. I did not forsake you without trying."

"What do you mean, darling? How have you forsaken me?"

"When he caught hold of me, there was plenty of time to call out. I might have warned you—I might have warned you. I might have done what she did. But I couldn't. I tried, but I couldn't. I was afraid. He said he would blow my head to bits. I was afraid, and I left her to save you."

"My dearest girl," he said, taking her hand, "you did the only thing. If you had cried out, he would have murdered you first and me afterwards; all the chambers of the revolver were loaded. I would have died a thousand times sooner than have one of your dear hairs roughened; but, as it was, your death wouldn't have saved me."

She had looked at him for a moment as if with sudden hope, but, as he finished, she shook her head and said,

"I didn't think anything about that. I was just afraid, and I should have let you be killed."

"My sweet, who ever expected you to condemn yourself to certain death on the chance of saving me? It would be monstrous!"

"She did it," said Janet in low tones.

Dale paused for a minute.

"She was not in his clutches," he said. "He might have missed her."

"Ah, no, no!" she broke out suddenly. "You run down what she did to spare me! That's worst of all."



## A MORBID SCRUPLE

“Why, Jan, I don’t say a word against her; but there was a difference.”

“She thought of no difference. She only thought of you. I thought of my own life.”

“Thank God if you did, dearest!”

“I’m glad you came. I wanted to tell you I had tried.”

“I need nothing to make me love you more, my beauty and delight,” he said, pressing her to him.

She looked at him with a sort of amazement, making a faint effort to push him away.

“It was so lucky,” he went on, “that I didn’t see you, or I should have rushed at him, and he would most likely have killed you. As it was—” He paused, for it seemed impossible to speak of poor Nellie’s hurt as a happy outcome.

“Come,” he resumed, “let’s think no more about it. The wretched man is dead, and Nellie Fane is getting better, and we—why, we, Jan, have one another.”

With sudden impatience she rose, unlacing his arms from about her.

“Who is she?” she cried. “Who is she? Why should she give her life for you? I loved you, and I was afraid. She wasn’t afraid.”

Dale thought that he began to understand a little better. Jealousy was a feeling he had read about, and seen, and written about. If Jan were jealous, he could undertake to reassure her.

“She’s a very old and good friend of mine,” he said, “and it was just like her brave, unselfish way to——”

“What had you done to make her love you so?”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“My sweetest Jan, surely you can’t think I——”

“Oh, no, no, no! I don’t mean that. I’m not so mean as that.”

Dale wondered whether this passionate disclaimer of jealousy did not come in part from self-delusion, though he saw that Janet made it in all genuineness.

“You have made her love you—oh, of course you have! Why did she follow you? why did she come between you and the shot? I loved you too, Dale. Ah! how I loved—how I thought I loved you! But her love was greater than mine.”

“Come, Jan, come; you exaggerate. You must be calm, dearest. Nellie and I are very fond of one another, but——”

“You know she loves you—you know she loves you to death.”

“My darling, I don’t know anything of the sort. But supposing she did—well, I am very sorry, very deeply grieved if she is unhappy; but I don’t love her—or any other woman in the world but you, Jan. If she had saved my life a thousand times, it would make no difference. You, Jan, you are the breath of my life and the pulse of my blood.”

He spoke with passion, for he was roused to combat this strange idea that threatened all his joy. As she stood before him, in her fairness and distress, he forgot his searchings of heart, his tenderness for Nellie, everything, except that she, and she alone, was the woman to be his, and neither another nor she herself should prevent it.

Looking at him, she read this, or some of it, in his eyes, for she shrank back from him, and, clasping her hands, moaned,

“Don’t, don’t! You must go to her—you be-



## A MORBID SCRUPLE

long to her. She saved you, not I. You are her's, not mine."

"Jan, this is madness! She is nothing to me; you are all the world."

"You must despise me," she said in a wondering way, "and yet you say that!"

"If I did despise you, still it would be true. But I worship you."

"I must not! I must not! You must go to her. She saved you. Leave me, Dale, and go back. You must not come again."

He burst out in wrath.

"Now, by God, I will not leave you or let you go! Mine you are, and mine you shall be!" and he seized her by the wrist. She gave a startled cry, that recalled him to gentleness.

"Did I frighten you, my beauty? But it is so, and it must be. It is sweet of you to offer—to make much of what she did, and little of yourself. I love you more for it. But we have done with that now. Come to me, Jan."

"I can't! I can't! She would always be between us; I should always see her between us. Oh, Dale, how can you leave her?"

"I have never loved her. I have never promised her," he replied sternly. "It is all a mere delusion. A man's love is not to be turned by folly like this."

She answered nothing, and sank back in her chair again.

"If it's jealousy," he went on, "it is unworthy of you, and an insult to me. And if it's not jealousy, it's mere madness."

"Can't you understand?" she murmured. "How can I take what is hers?"



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“I can take what is mine, and I will. You gave yourself to me, and I will not let you go.”

Still she said nothing, and he tried gentleness once more.

“Come, Jan, sweetest, you have made your offering—your sweet, Quixotic self-sacrifice—and it is not accepted! Say that’s my want of moral altitude, if you like. So be it. I won’t sacrifice myself.”

“It’s for her to take, not for you. I offer it to her, not to you.”

“But I don’t offer it to her. Would she care for such an offer? She may love me or not—I don’t know, but if she does, she will not take my hand without my heart.”

“You must love her. If you could love me, how much more must you love her?”

“You are mad!” he answered, almost roughly,—“mad to say such a thing! I know you love me, and I will not listen to it. Do you hear? I shall come back and see you again, and I will not listen to this.”

She heard his imperious words with no sign but a little shiver.

“There,” he went on, “you are still ill. I’ll come back.”

“No use,” she murmured. “I can’t, Dale.”

“But you will, and you shall!” he cried. “You shall see——”

The door opened, and the nurse came in to forbid his further lingering. With a distant good-bye, he left Janet motionless and pale, and, hastening down-stairs, went to the Squire’s room.

“I have come,” he said abruptly, “to ask your sanction to my engagement with your daughter.”



## A MORBID SCRUPLE

The Squire laid down his book.

"I'm not much surprised," he said, smiling.  
"What does Jan say?"

Dale launched out into a history of the sweet things Janet had said, and of the strange, wild things she said now. The Squire heard of the latter with raised eyebrows.

"Very odd," he commented. "But it seems, my dear fellow, that, for good reasons or bad, at present she says No."

"She said Yes; she can't say No now," declared Dale. "Do you consent, Mr. Delane?"

"If she does, my dear fellow. But I can't help you in this matter."

"I want no help. She is not in her senses now. I shall make an end of this folly. I will not have it."

He went out as abruptly as he had rushed in, leaving the Squire in some perplexity.

"A man of decision," he commented; "and, altogether, a couple of rather volcanic young people. They must settle it between themselves."



## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE HEROINE OF THE INCIDENT

AFTER Dale's visit to the Grange, a few days elapsed in a quiet that was far from peaceful. Dale had gone to the Grange the next day, and the day after that: the sight of Janet had been denied to him. He was told that his visit had left her very agitated and upset, and the Doctor was peremptory in forbidding any repetition of it. He had sent her a note, and she had returned a verbal message by her mother that she did not feel equal to writing. Was it possible that she meant to abide by her insane resolve to break off their engagement?

At Littlehill, things were hardly more happy. Nellie was recovering, but very slowly, and she also remained invisible. Arthur Angell manifested all the symptoms of resentment and disappointed love, and only Philip Hume's usual placid cheerfulness redeemed the house from an atmosphere of intolerable depression. Philip had discovered a fund of amusement in the study of Mrs. Hodge. As soon as that good lady's first apprehensions were soothed, she was seized with an immense and exuberant pride in her daughter, which found expression both in her words and her bearing. Though ignorant of the historical precedent, she assumed the demeanour of a mother of the Gracchi, and pointed out to all who would listen to her—and Philip never thought of refusing her this kindness—small incidents and traits of character which had marked out



## THE HEROINE OF THE INCIDENT

Nellie from her very cradle as one of heroic mould and dauntless courage.

"I should be astonished, if I did not know her mother," said Philip politely.

"Ah, you must be chaffing, of course. But it's not me she takes it from. My heart goes pit-a-pat at a mouse."

"Oh, then it's Mr. Hodge."

"You couldn't," said Mrs. Hodge, with emphasis, "catch Hodge at a loss. He was ready for anything. He'd have been proud to see Nellie to-day. Look what the papers are saying of her!"

"I'm sure she deserves it all."

"Ay, that she does: she deserves all Dale Banister can do for her."

Philip scented danger in this topic, and changed the subject.

"When are we to see her?" he asked.

"In a day or two, I expect. She's much better this morning. She's asked to see the papers, and I'm going to take her the *Chronicle*."

"How delightful to read of one's heroic actions! I have never enjoyed the sensation."

"Nor ever will, young man, if you spend all your time loafing," said Mrs. Hodge incisively.

"Well, there must be some ordinary people," protested Philip. "The *rôle* is unappreciated, so it's the more creditable in me to stick to it."

"A parcel of nonsense! Where's that paper?"

She took it, went up-stairs, and gave it to Nellie.

"There, read that. See what they say about you, my dearie. I'm going to see little Roberts, and I shall be back in an hour. You've got the bell by you, and the nurse'll hear you."

Nellie, left alone, began to read the *Chronicle*.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

She read the whole account from beginning to end, the article in praise of her, and, in the later edition, the editor's romantic forecast. Then she put the papers aside, exclaiming, "Oh, if it could be true!" and lay back with closed eyes.

A few days later, she made her first appearance in the drawing-room, where she held a little court. Her mother hung over all, anticipating far more wants than the patient was likely to feel, and, by constant anxious questions, almost producing the fatigue she wished to guard against. Tora Smith was there, in a state of gleeful adoration; and Arthur Angell, his sorrows temporarily laid aside, ready with a mock heroic ode; and Philip Hume, new come from Mrs. Roberts' with good news and a high eulogy on Dr. Spink's most marked and assiduous attention.

"I really believe," he said, with a laugh, "that Mrs. Roberts will have another chance of being a Denborough doctor's wife, if she likes."

"That would be an ideal ending," said Tora.

"Therefore it will not happen," Arthur remarked.

"Poets are allowed to be pessimistic," rejoined Tora. "But you're wrong, Mr. Angell. Ideal things do happen."

"To Sir Harry Fulmer, for instance," put in Philip.

"Nonsense, Mr. Hume! I wasn't thinking of that. Don't you agree with me, Nellie?"

"Nellie has made an ideal thing happen," said Philip, and Nellie blushed.

"Thanks, Phil," said Dale. "It's complimentary to describe the prolongation of my poor existence in that way."



## THE HEROINE OF THE INCIDENT

“The deed is good, however unworthy the object, Dale.”

Dale took Nellie's hand and patted it gently.

“Good child,” he said, and Nellie flushed again with an almost strange intensity of embarrassment. Tora rose abruptly, and, in spite of opposition, insisted on departure. Dale escorted her to her carriage.

“I have asked Nellie to come and stay with me,” said she, “as soon as she is well enough to move.”

“She will like that. I hope she is going?”

“She said,” Tora went on, speaking with emphasis, “that she would ask you.”

Dale made a little gesture of protest, partly against Nellie's reported saying, more against the reporter's inquiring gaze. He began to be astonished at the interest he was so unfortunate as to inspire in his affairs.

“I shall advise her to go,” he said. “I think a change will be good for her.”

“I incline to think so too,” said Tora, with sudden coldness; “but I thought you might not like to part with her.”

“Mount Pleasant is not inaccessible,” responded Dale, with equal coldness. Returning to the house, he found Nellie gone, the company dispersed, and Mrs. Hodge in his smoking-room, apparently expecting him.

“Well, mother,” he said,—he had used to call her “mother” when he was always running in and out of her house in London,—“Nellie looks quite blooming.”

“She's mending nicely.”

“I hear she's to go to the Smiths'.”

“Well, I thought of taking her to Brighton.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Oh, it will be more amusing at the Smiths'; unless, of course, she needs the sea."

"She thought, or I thought rather, that you might like to come with us for a while?" said Mrs. Hodge in a tentative tone.

"I can't get away," answered Dale decisively. Nothing would have taken him away from the Grange gates.

Mrs. Hodge took her courage in both hands.

"Look here, Dale," she said. "You know I'm not one of those women that lay hold of a man if he as much as looks at a girl, and asks him what he means by it. That's not my way. Hodge used to say girls could take care of themselves mostly—p'r'aps he wasn't far out. But Nellie's not that sort, and her father's gone, good man, and"—and the excellent lady came to a full stop.

Dale loved this honest old woman for long acquaintance' sake and much kindness. He laid his hand on her shoulder and said,

"It's a sad world, mother."

"The child's fond of you, Dale. She's shown that."

"I'm a crossed lover too, mother. We can only weep together."

"What, you mean that Grange girl?" asked Mrs. Hodge, her love for her own making her tone tart.

"Yes, that Grange girl," answered Dale, with a rueful smile. "And just at present that Grange girl won't have anything to say to me."

Mrs. Hodge pressed his hand and whispered,

"Don't you tell Nellie what I say, but let her go, dearie, and take my girl. She's sick for you, Dale, though she'd kill me if she heard me say it."

"Ay, but I'm sick for the Grange girl, mother."



## THE HEROINE OF THE INCIDENT

"You don't take it ill of me, Dale? But there! a kind word from you is more than the doctors to her. She'd say nothing of what she's done, and I say nothing, but she's a good girl, and a pretty girl."

"That she is, and she deserves a better man than I am."

"Well, there it is! Talking mends no holes," said Mrs. Hodge, with a heavy sigh. Then she added, in an outburst of impatience,

"Why did you ever come to this miserable little place?"

Dale raised inquiring hands to heaven and shrugged his shoulders.

"What they call fate, mother," said he. "Come, cheer up. She'll get over this little idea. She'll be all right."

"Please God," said Mrs. Hodge. "It's time for her beef-tea."

The phrase, Please God, is as a rule expressive of the speaker's desire, but not of his expectation. So it was with Mrs. Hodge, but Dale could not bring himself to take so gloomy a view. A man's own passion assumes a most imposing appearance of permanence, but he finds it easy to look with incredulity on a like assumption in the feelings of others. He had keen sympathy for Nellie in the moment or the period of pain which seemed to lie before her, but experience told him that all probabilities were in favour of her escaping from it at no distant time. Love like his for Janet—and, till this unhappy day, he would have added, Janet's for him—was exceptional; change, recovery, oblivion,—these were the rule—the happy rule whose operation smoothed love's rough ways.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

Nevertheless, be this wide philosophical view as just as it might, the present position came nigh to being intolerable, and it was hard to blame him if he looked forward to Nellie's departure with relief. Her presence accused him of cruelty, for it seems cruel to refuse what would give happiness, and it increased every day it continued the misunderstanding which already existed as to their future relations. Even now, in spite of Janet's protest, Dale was convinced he had detected an under-current of jealousy, flowing in to reinforce the stream of that higher, but stranger and wilder feeling which had made her drive him away. If she heard that Nellie remained at his house, and what conclusion was universally drawn from the fact, he was afraid that, when restored health carried away the morbid idea which was now most prominent, the jealousy might remain, and, if it did, Janet's proud nature was ground on which it would bear fruit bitter for him to taste.

He could not and did not for a moment blame Mrs. Hodge for her action. It was the natural outcome of her love, and she had performed her difficult task, as it seemed to him, with a perfect observance of all the essential marks of good-breeding, however homely her method had been. But she could not understand even his love for Janet, much less another feeling in him, which aided to make her intercession vain. For he did not deny now that, besides the joy he had in Janet as a woman merely, there was also the satisfaction he derived from the fact that she was Miss Delane of Dirkham Grange. Fools and would-be cynics might dismiss this as snobbery; but Dale told himself that he was right and wise in clinging to



## THE HEROINE OF THE INCIDENT

the place in this new world which his sojourn at Denborough had opened to him, and which a marriage with Janet would secure for him in perpetuity. Setting aside altogether questions of sentiment, he felt it useless not to recognise that, if he married Nellie Fane, he would drift back into his old world, the gates would close again, and the fresh realms of life and experience, which had delighted his taste and stimulated his genius, would be his to wander in no more. He had grown to love this world, this old world so new to him; and he loved Janet not least because all about her, her face, her speech, her motions, her every air, were redolent to him of its assured distinction and unboastful pride. Nay, even these fantastic scruples of hers were but a distortion of a noble instinct born in her blood, and witnessed to a nature and qualities that he could look for only in the shade of some such place as Dirkham Grange. He felt as if he too belonged to her race, and had been all his life an exile from his native land, whither at last a happy chance had led back his wandering feet. What would dear old Mother Hodge understand of all that? What even would Nellie herself, for all her ready sympathies? It was a feeling that, not vulgar in itself, seemed to become vulgar in the telling; and, after all, he had no need of other justification than his love and his pledged word.

He looked out of the window and saw Arthur Angell walking moodily up and down. Putting on his hat, he joined him, passing his arm through his. Arthur turned to him with a petulant look.

“A lot of miserables we are, old boy,” said Dale, pressing the arm he held. “I am often tempted



## A CHANGE OF AIR

to regret, Arthur, that the State has not charged itself with the control of marriages. It would relieve us all of a large amount of trouble, and I really don't see that it would hurt any one except novelists. I am feeling badly in need of a benevolent despotism."

"I'm going back to town," Arthur announced abruptly.

"I'm very sorry. But I don't know that it's any use asking you to stay. Nellie goes to the Smiths in a day or two——"

"It makes no difference to me where she goes," interrupted the unhappy young man. "I—I mean——"

"I know what you mean."

Philip came up, and glanced keenly at Arthur. Then he smiled good-humouredly and said,

"Shall I prophesy unto you?"

"No," said Arthur. "I know you're going to say it'll be all the same six months hence."

"I was. I can't deny it, Arthur. You forget that I have seen you like this many times before. We may have a tragedy or we may not, Arthur, but I shall take leave to eliminate you from the cast."

"I'm going to pack," said Arthur angrily, and he went into the house.

"When there are real troubles about," said Philip, "it is well to clear the ground. There's not much the matter with him."

"I think he feels it rather, you know."

"Oh yes ; it's worth a set of verses."

"I'm glad to hear it's no worse : for, to tell you the truth, Phil, there's enough to worry about without Arthur. I'm glad our party is breaking up."



## THE HEROINE OF THE INCIDENT

“ Why ? ”

“ We know too much about one another to live together comfortably.”

“ True. Shall I go ? ”

“ No,” said Dale, with a smile ; “ you may stay and keep watch over the razors.”



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE SCENE OF THE OUTRAGE

THE excitement and bustle which attended and followed on the attempted murder, the suicide, the inquest, the illnesses, and the true and false reports concerning each and all of these incidents, had hardly subsided, before the Mayor of Market Denborough, with the perseverance that distinguished him, began once more to give his attention to the royal visit. For reasons which will be apparent to all who study the manner in which one man becomes a knight, while another remains unhonoured, the Mayor was particularly anxious that the Institute should not lose the *éclat* which the Duke of Mercia had promised to bestow on its opening, and that its opening should take place during his mayoralty.

The finger of fame pointed at Mr. Maggs the horse-dealer as Mr. Hedger's successor, and the idea of the waters of the fountain of honour flowing on to the head of Maggs, instead of on to his own, spurred the Mayor to keen exertion. He had interviews with the Squire, he wrote to the Lord-Lieutenant, he promoted a petition from the burgesses, and he carried a resolution in the Town Council. Mr. Delane was prevailed upon to use his influence with the Lord-Lieutenant; the Lord-Lieutenant could not, in view of Mr. Delane's urgent appeal, refuse to lay the question before His Royal Highness; and His Royal Highness was graciously pleased to say that he could not deny him-



## THE SCENE OF THE OUTRAGE

self the pleasure of obliging Lord Cransford, knowing not that he was in fact and in truth, if it may be spoken without *lèse-majesté*, merely an instrument in the clever fingers of a gentleman who, when the Prince was writing his reply, was rolling pills in the parlour behind his shop in the town of Market Denborough.

Now, Colonel Smith had never concealed his opinion that, however much evil that unhappy man James Roberts had to answer for, yet he deserved a scrap of grateful memory, inasmuch as he had by his action averted the calamity that was threatening the town, and, furthermore, robbed Dale Bannister of the chance of prostituting his genius. Accordingly, when it was announced in the *Standard*, three or four weeks after James Roberts had shot at Dale Bannister and wounded Nellie Fane, that the Duke had given a conditional promise to pay his deferred visit in June, the Colonel laid down the paper and said to the rest of the breakfast-party at Mount Pleasant—and the Colonel must bear the responsibility for the terms he thought proper to employ—

“That old fool Cransford has nobbled the whippersnapper again! We’re to have him after all! Good Lord!”

Tora at once appreciated his meaning.

“Papa means the Prince is coming, Nellie!” cried she. “How splendid!”

“Bannister will have a chance of blacking his boots now,” pursued the Colonel, trying to impose a malignant sneer on his obstinately kindly countenance.

“You are not to say such things,” said Nellie emphatically. “You know you don’t mean them.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Not mean them?" exclaimed the Colonel.

"No. You're not horrid, and it's no use trying to make yourself horrid. Is it, Tora?"

Tora's thoughts were far away.

"In June," she said meditatively. "I hope it won't be the first week, or we shall have to come back early."

The Colonel's face expressed concentrated scorn.

"You would cut short your honeymoon in order to come back?"

"Of course, dear. I wouldn't miss it. Oh, and, Nellie, I shall go in next after Lady Cransford!"

This was too much for the Colonel; he said nothing himself, but his joy was great when Sir Harry pointed out that Mrs. Hedger would have official precedence over the new Lady Fulmer. The Colonel chuckled, and Tora pretended that she had remembered about Mrs. Hedger all the time.

"Johnstone will probably take you in, Tora," said Sir Harry, who had lately found himself able to treat Tora with less fearful respect.

"I don't care. I shall talk to the Prince. Now, Nellie, you must come down for it."

Nellie would not give any promise, and Tora forbore to press her, for she confessed to herself and to Sir Harry that she did not quite understand the position of affairs. Janet Delane remained in strict seclusion; doctor's orders were alleged, but Tora was inclined to be sceptical, for she had seen Janet out driving, and reported that she looked strong and well. Dale was at Littlehill, and he was there alone, Philip having gone back to London with Arthur Angell. He often came over to Mount Pleasant, to see Nellie, no doubt; and when he came, he was most attentive and kind to her. Yet he reso-



## THE SCENE OF THE OUTRAGE

lutely refused to stay in the house, always returning in an hour or two to his solitary life at Littlehill. He seemed never to see Janet, and to know not much more about her than the rest of the world did. He never referred to her unquestioned, and when he spoke of Nellie's share in the scene in the garden, he appeared pointedly to avoid discussing Janet's. Tora concluded that there was some break in his relations with Janet, and, led on by her sympathies, had small difficulty in persuading herself that he was by degrees being induced by affection and gratitude to feel towards Nellie as everybody expected and wished him to feel. Only, if so, it was hard to see why Nellie's pleasure in his visits seemed mingled with a nervousness which the increased brightness of her prospects did not allay. Evidently she also was puzzled by Janet's conduct; and it was equally clear that she did not yet feel confident that Dale had renounced his fancy for Janet and given his heart to her.

In after-days, Dale was wont to declare that the fortnight he passed alone at Littlehill was the most miserable in his life, and people given to improving the occasion would then tell him that he had no experience of what real misery was. Yet he was very miserable. He was sore to the heart at Janet's treatment of him; she would neither see him, nor, till he absolutely insisted, write to him, and then she sent three words—"It's no use." In face of this incredible delusion of hers, he felt himself helpless; and the Squire, with all the good-will in the world to him, could only shrug his shoulders and say that Jan was a strange girl; while Mrs. Delane, knowing nothing of the cause of her daughter's refusal to see Dale, had once again begun to revive her old



## A CHANGE OF AIR

hopes, and allowed herself to hint at them to her favourite Gerard Ripley. Of course this latter fact was not known to Dale, but he was aware that Captain Ripley had called two or three times at the Grange, and had seen Janet once. The "doctor's orders" applied, it seemed, to him alone; and his bitterness of heart increased, mingling with growing impatience and resentment. Nellie could never have acted like this: she was too kind and gentle, love was real in her, a mastering power, and not itself the plaything of fantastic scruples—unless a worse thing were true, unless the scruples themselves were the screen of some unlooked-for and sudden infidelity of heart. The thought was treason, but he could not stifle it. Yet, even while it possessed him, while he told himself that he had now full right to transfer his allegiance, that no one could blame him, that every motive urged him, all the while in his inmost mind he never lost the knowledge that it was Janet he wanted; and when he came to see Nellie, he was unable, even if he had been willing,—and he told himself he was,—to say anything but words of friendship and thanks, unable to frame a sentence distantly approaching the phrases of love he knew she longed to hear.

Matters were in this very unsatisfactory condition when Philip Hume returned to Littlehill, and straightway became the unwilling recipient of Dale's troubled confidences. A fortnight's solitude had been too much for Dale, and he poured out his perplexities, saying, with an apologetic laugh,

"I'm bound to tell some one. I believe, if you hadn't come, I should have made a clean breast of it to the Mayor."

"You might do worse. The Mayor is a man of



## THE SCENE OF THE OUTRAGE

sagacity. This young woman seems very unreasonable."

"What young woman?"

"Why, Miss Delane."

"Well, Phil, you must allow for the delicacy of her——"

"You called it infernal nonsense yourself just now."

"I wish, Phil, you'd call at the Grange, and see her, and tell me what you think about her."

"I can't do any good, but I'll go, if you like."

Accordingly, he went, and did, as he expected, no good at all. Janet had resumed her ordinary manner, with an additional touch or two of vivacity and loquaciousness, which betrayed the uneasiness they were meant to hide. The only subjects she discussed were the last new novel and Tora Smith's wedding, and Philip took his leave, entirely unenlightened. The Squire offered to walk part of the way with him, and they set out together.

The Squire stopped at the scene of the disaster. Pointing with his toe to a spot by the side of the drive——

"That's where that mad wretch stood, holding my poor girl," he said.

Philip nodded.

"And where was Dale?" he asked, for it was his first visit to the spot.

The Squire was delighted to be *cicerone*.

"He was standing with his back to that tree yonder, about fifteen yards off, looking due north, towards the house, thinking of a poem or some nonsense, I suppose."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, then," pursued the Squire, "you see he



## A CHANGE OF AIR

was almost in a straight line with Roberts—Roberts' barrel must have pointed straight towards Denborough church spire. After the first shot, Bannister sprang forward—the gravel was soft, and we saw every footprint—to where Miss Fane fell, and——”

“Where did she fall?”

The Squire's toe indicated a spot about three yards from the tree.

“She was running up from behind Bannister, you know, and had just got across the line of fire, when the bullet caught her. She fell forward on her face,—she was bound to, Spink said, from the way she was hit,—and Bannister just got his arm under her, to break her fall.”

“She was running towards him, I suppose, to warn him?”

“To get between him and Roberts, like the noble girl she is, no doubt; but she seemed to have turned round on hearing the shot, because, to judge from the way she was lying, she was at the moment she fell, heading almost south.”

“What, towards the house?”

“Yes, in a slanting line, from the tree towards the house.”

“That's away from Bannister?”

“Yes, and from Roberts too. You see she must have turned. It was a fine thing. Well, I must get back; I'm busy with all the preparations for this affair. Good-day, Mr. Hume. Very kind of you to come and see us.”

“I'm so glad to find Miss Delane better.”

“Yes, she's better, thanks, but not herself yet, by any means. Good-day.”

Philip went home, lit a pipe, and drew a neat lit-



## THE SCENE OF THE OUTRAGE

the plan of the scene which had just been so carefully described to him. By the time the drawing was made, the pipe was finished, and he was obliged to light another, which he consumed while he sat gazing at his handiwork. He was still pondering over it, when Dale came in, and flung himself into an arm-chair with a restless sigh.

"What's up now?" asked Philip.

"Only that I'm the most miserable dog alive. I tell you what, Phil, I'm going to settle this affair one way or the other. I won't be played with any more. I shall go up to the Grange to-morrow."

"You can't—it's Fulmer's wedding."

"Hang his wedding! Well, then, next day—and get a definite answer from Janet. It's too bad of her. Did you have any talk with her to-day?"

"Only general conversation. She gave me no chance."

"I don't understand her, but I'll have it settled. I've been at Mount Pleasant, and—by God, Phil, I can't stand the sort of anxious, beseeching way Nellie looks. I know it sounds absurd to hear a man talk like that, but it's a fact."

"Then why do you go?"

"Well, considering what she's done, I don't see how I can very well stay away."

"Oh! No, I suppose not," said Philip, touching up his plan; "but if I were you, Dale, I should wait a bit before I bothered Miss Delane again. Give her time, man."

"No, I won't. She's not treating me fairly."

"What's that got to do with it? You want to marry her, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"Then give her time. Give her a week at all



## A CHANGE OF AIR

events. You can sound her at the wedding to-morrow, but don't present your ultimatum."

And Dale agreed, on much persuasion, to give her a week.

"That's more sensible. And, Dale, may I ask Arthur Angell down for a day or two?"

"Of course, but I don't know whether he'll come."

"Oh, he'll come, fast enough."

"What do you want him for?"

"To consult him about a little work of mine," answered Philip, regarding his sketch critically.

"Going to publish something?"

"I don't know. That depends."

"On the publishers? *Ca va sans dire*. But how can Arthur help you?"

"He was there."

"Where?"

"Now, Dale, I can understand your impatience—but you must wait. If I publish it, you shall see it."

"Is it my sort? Shall I like it?"

"I think your feelings would be mixed," said Philip, delicately filling in Nellie Fane's figure on the ground.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### AGAINST HER BETTER JUDGMENT

It is never well to vie with experts in their own subjects ; humiliation surely attends the audacious attempt, and a humiliation which receives and deserves no softening sympathy. Moreover, even if the technical difficulties could be overcome, the description of a wedding must be either florid or cynical, assuming impossible happiness, or insinuating improbable catastrophe. Wherefore this narrative, which abhors either of these extremes, takes leave to resume its course at the moment when Sir Harry and Lady Fulmer have been driven away for their honeymoon, and the guests at Mount Pleasant are engaged in looking at one another's presents, one another's clothes, and their own watches, while a group of men have sought retirement and cigars in the garden. The Lord-Lieutenant was paying compliments of alarming elaboration and stateliness to Nellie Fane; and Janet Delane, having discharged her duty in that line with generous graciousness, was looking with despair at Captain Ripley's puzzled face and betugged moustache, and wondering why men could not or would not understand plain English, and why—why above all—they had no more sense of dignity or of timeliness than to renew useless entreaties in a roomful of people, and—to descend to the particular case—with Dale Bannister only a few yards away, paying obvious inattention to a rhapsodic bridesmaid.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“Wasn’t it a pretty wedding?” asked the bridesmaid. “You know I’m a stranger to Denborough, and I never knew you had so many beautiful girls. It might have been St. Peter’s.”

“Might it?” said Dale, with an absent smile, entirely unappreciative of the compliment. He did not know what or where St. Peter’s was.

“Oh, it was lovely. Well, dear Tora herself is very pretty. And then, Miss Delane! I do *love* that severe, statuesque style, don’t you? How pale she is, though! she doesn’t look very happy, does she? Oh, and Miss Fane! Isn’t she lovely? She sings, doesn’t she? I think people of that kind are so nice. Oh, and I’ve heard all about her. How nice it was of her to be so brave, wasn’t it?”

“Naturally, I think so.”

“Oh, of course, I forgot. It’s so nice when people are good and pretty too, isn’t it? After all, good looks do go for something, don’t they?” and she fixed a pair of large and unnaturally innocent eyes on Dale.

“You must tell me about that,” he said, with laboured politeness. “How do you find it?”

“Oh, nonsense, Mr. Bannister! But, seriously, did you ever see anything so lovely as the way Sir Harry looked at Tora when they were——”

Dale had gone—without a word of excuse. He had seen Janet rise abruptly, with an impatient wave of her hand, and Captain Ripley turn on his heel and disappear into the eddying throng that was circling round the wedding presents. He darted across to Janet, and held out his hand.

“I must see you here,” he said, “since you will not see me at the Grange.”

The bridesmaid marked their greeting. She rose



## AGAINST HER BETTER JUDGMENT

with offended dignity and returned to her mother. She says to this day that she has only known one poet, and he was not at all nice, and concludes, after the manner of a certain part of humanity, that none of the rest are nice either.

Janet looked at Dale doubtfully, then she led the way to a little room which was free from the crowd. Then she sat down. "I'm very tired," she said, "and I want to stay here and rest. Will you let me?"

"I know what you mean, Jan. How can I, when I never have a chance of saying what I want to say to you? You talk to Ripley——"

"I don't comfort Gerard Ripley much."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Dale heartlessly.

"I'm not much troubled about him. I'm only a habit to him."

"I don't care twopence about him. Jan, when is this sort of thing to end? Don't you like seeing me?"

Janet had made up her mind to treat Dale at first with simple friendliness; if this recipe failed, it was to be followed by distant civility. She answered collectively enough, in spite of a quiver in her voice,

"I thought I had better not see you just now."

"Why, in Heaven's name?"

"I can't go through it all again. Indeed I can't, Dale."

"Do you seriously expect me to be content with what you said then—to go away and never come near you again?"

Dale spoke vehemently. It was obvious that the distant civility would be called into play. Perhaps silence was Janet's idea of it, for she said nothing.



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“Because that’s what it comes to,” pursued Dale. “Do you imagine, Jan, I could see you now—after it all—except as your lover? What do you want me to do?”

“Miss Fane”—began Janet in a very small voice.

“I’ll never see Nellie Fane again, if she robs me of you,” Dale declared, with great energy, and probably perfect, though unintentional, untruth.

Janet looked up and met his eyes. Then she dropped hers, and said, in tones quite unlike those of distant civility,

“I wonder how you care for such a mean-spirited creature as I am. If I told you I loved you still—how could you believe me? I told you before, and then I——”

“Behaved like a sensible girl.”

“Oh no, no. It was a lie when I said——”

“Tell me another then,” said Dale. “I like them.”

Janet’s resistance, like Bob Acres’ courage, was oozing out of her finger-tips.

“I know what it will be,” she faltered plaintively. “You’ll always be thinking about her, and so shall I—and it will be horrible. No, I won’t do it. I have some resolution, Dale; it wasn’t mere nonsense. I did mean it.”

“Oh, no,” said Dale persuasively; “you never did, Jan. You had no idea how bored you would be without me. Now, had you?”

“I can never respect myself again.”

“It’s quite unnecessary, dear; I’ll do all that.”

“Are you really quite—quite sure, Dale, that you will never——”



## AGAINST HER BETTER JUDGMENT

“Oh, hang it all!” said Dale, and he kissed her.

“Dale! the door’s open.”

Dale shut it, and the rest of the conversation became inaudible, and remains unknown.

The guests had gone. Mrs. Hodge and Nellie, who were to keep the Colonel company for a little while, had walked down to Denborough to tell Mrs. Roberts all about the event of the day; and the Colonel was bustling about, getting the presents packed up, and counting, with some surprise, the empty champagne bottles. He was thus engaged when the door of the little room opened, to let Janet and Dale out.

“Dear me! I thought you’d gone. Nellie asked me, and I told her so.”

“I am just going, Colonel Smith,” said Janet.

“So am I,” said Dale.

The Colonel watched them go together.

“There’s another man going to lose his daughter,” he said. “By Jove, I thought it was to be Nellie Fane!”

When Janet left Dale at the Grange gates, she went to her father’s study.

“Lord, child,” said the Squire, “are you only just back?”

“I stayed to see them off.”

“Your mother did that, and she’s been back two hours. She couldn’t find you.”

“Papa,” said Janet, sitting on the arm of his chair, “I’m very much ashamed of myself.”

“What have you been doing now? Ill-treating that poor young man again?”

“No.”

“He’s not a bad fellow, you know, after all—honest and good—not brilliant, of course.”



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Not brilliant, papa?"

"I don't mean he's a fool; I believe he's an efficient officer——"

"Officer? Why, you're talking of Gerard!"

"Of course I am."

"How can you imagine I was thinking of Gerard? I meant Mr. Bannister."

"Bannister? Why, you told me only the other day——"

"Yes. That's why."

"Why what, child?"

"Why I'm ashamed."

The Squire raised himself and looked severely at his daughter.

"A precious fuss you've made about nothing."

"I can't help it, papa. I don't want to, but he insists."

"He seems to know how to manage you, which is more than I do. There, go and tell your mother. And, Jan!"

"Yes."

"If ever you say you won't have him again——"

"Yes, papa."

"By Jove, you shan't!" said the Squire, with emphasis, and he added, as his daughter fled after a hasty kiss, "Perhaps that'll keep her quiet."

Dale found nobody but Philip Hume to congratulate him, and Philip was, as usual now, busy over his little plan.

"Oh, she's come round, has she?" he asked, with no sign of surprise.

Dale said she had, and Philip meditatively took up his little plan.

"Have you told Nellie?" he asked.

"No. I haven't seen her."



## AGAINST HER BETTER JUDGMENT

"She never knew you had asked Miss Delane before?"

"No. Nobody knew but her people and you. I think she had an idea I liked Jan."

"Yes, but not more?"

"No. I don't think so."

Philip whistled gently, and twisted the little plan in his fingers. Dale, in his good-humour, said,

"Why the deuce, Phil, do you go on fidgeting with that thing? You're like an old hen over an egg."

"Yes; I don't know that it is any good. I think I'll destroy it."

And he tore it slowly in two, and threw it in the fire.

"The vindictive theory of punishment," he remarked, with apparent irrelevance, "does not commend itself to me. If no evil consequences exist to be averted, why should we punish?" and he pushed the plan farther into the blaze with the poker.

"If you want to argue that sort of thing, old fellow, you must ring for Wilson. I'm going to have a try at some verses."

"Going to write your own epitaph, like Swift?"

Dale shook his head and smiled, with the impenetrable, hopeless happiness of successful love.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### A VILLAIN UNMASKED

A FEW days after Dale's love-affairs had begun to flow in a more peaceful channel, the Mayor of Market Denborough had an interview with Mr. Philip Hume, and Philip emerged from the conversation with a smile of mingled amusement and perplexity on his face. The Mayor had been to the Grange; the Squire fully approved of the scheme; a hundred pounds was subscribed already, and another twenty or thirty expected. Philip was requested to act as an intermediary, and find out from Miss Fane what form she would prefer that the testimonial which Denborough intended to offer to her, in recognition of her signal gallantry, should take.

"I wanted to wait and make it a wedding-present," said the Mayor with a wink, "but the Squire thinks we had better not wait for that."

"Ah, does he?" said Philip.

"Though what Mr. Bannister's waitin' for, I can't see; and I said as much to Miss Janet when I met her in the garden."

"What did she say?" asked Philip in some curiosity.

"Well, sir, now you ask me, I don't think she said anything. She seemed a bit put-out like about something."

"It couldn't have been anything you said?"

"Why, no, sir. I only said as I shouldn't be



## A VILLAIN UNMASKED

slow to move if a young lady like Miss Fane was waitin' for me—and her havin' saved my life too."

"Good Lord !"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir ?"

"Nothing, Mr. Mayor, nothing."

"You'll see Miss Fane about it? She hasn't left the Colonel's."

"Oh yes, I suppose so. Yes, I'll see her."

Dale had gone to London, alleging that he had shopping to do, and hardly denying that his business would lie chiefly at the jeweller's. Philip was glad that he was away, for he thus could start on his mission unquestioned. He found Nellie at home, and at once plunged into the matter. Directly Nellie understood what was proposed, she jumped up, crying,

"Oh no, they mustn't ! You must stop them."

"Why, it's a very natural tribute——"

"I won't have it ! I can't have it ! You must tell them, Mr. Hume."

"It'll look rather ungracious, won't it? Why shouldn't you take their present ?" he asked, looking at her in a half-amused way.

"Oh no, no ! You don't understand. Oh, what a wretched girl I am !" and Nellie, flinging herself in a chair, began to cry.

He sat and watched her with a grim smile, which he made an effort to maintain. But the sobs were rather piteous, and the smile gradually became very mildly ferocious, and presently vanished altogether. Presently, also, Nellie stopped crying, sat up, and stared in front of her with a dazed look and parted lips.

"Well ?" said Philip.

"I won't receive the testimonial."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

"Is that all you have to say?" he asked in a tone of disappointment.

"Yes," she answered, plucking nervously at her handkerchief, "that's all."

"No reason to give?"

"Tell them that there's nothing to give me a testimonial for."

"Shall I?" he asked.

Nellie glanced at him with a start, but in an instant she recovered herself.

"I mean that I would much rather no more fuss was made about what I did."

"As you please," he said coldly. "I will tell the Mayor, and get him to stop the thing."

"Is Dale at home?" she asked, as Philip rose.

"He's gone to town. Do you want to see him about anything?"

"No—nothing in particular—only—I haven't seen him for three or four days."

"Are you staying here long?"

"I am staying till Tora comes home, and then I go to her."

"Well, good-bye. I'll tell the Mayor."

"Thank you so much. Good-bye."

She was quite calm again by now; her sudden fit of agitation was over, and apparently she felt nothing more than a distaste for the parade of a public presentation. So easy and natural had her bearing become, that Philip Hume, as he walked away, wondered if he had been on a wrong scent after all. If so, he had behaved in a very brutal——

He broke off his thoughts abruptly, to recognise and bow to Janet Delane, who whirled by in her victoria, on the way to Mount Pleasant. She seemed to be going to pay a visit to Nellie Fane.



## A VILLAIN UNMASKED

Philip, who liked to hear how things happen, regretted that he had cut his own visit short and missed Janet's entry.

Janet whirled on. Her balance of mind, delicately poised between her love and her pride, had suffered a new and severe shock from the Mayor's jocose remarks. She could not rest. She felt that she must see for herself—must see Nellie and find out why everybody thought what they did—yes, and what Nellie thought. She was full of things which she had to say to Nellie; she was prepared, if need be, again to sacrifice herself for Nellie, but the truth about it all at least she was determined to hear; on what it was, Dale's uncertain happiness again hung suspended. With her usual frankness and candour, she straightway began to tell Nellie all her story. Nellie listened in almost stony stillness.

"It's so hard to speak of," said Janet; "but yet I think we must. It is wretched to let things go on like this. At least, I am wretched, and I fear he is, and——"

"I'm sure I am," said Nellie, with a forlorn laugh.

Janet came and knelt by her and took her hands.

"You too? you whom we all admire so? Oh, what a world it is! Why did I ever love him?"

"Ah, you do love him?"

"Yes. And why did I ever make him love me? Ah, Nellie, if only——"

Nellie had sprung up.

"How do you know he loves you?" she cried.

"How do I know, dear? Why, he told me."

"When? when?"



## A CHANGE OF AIR

“Why, before—the day before it all happened. But since then I have felt, and I told him, that he belonged to you—I mean, dear, that it must be you now whom he must really love, and that I——”

Nellie was not listening.

“He told you before?” she asked in a low voice.

“Yes, the day before. But afterwards——”

“You were actually engaged then?”

“Yes, we were.”

“I never knew it. I didn’t know that. Oh, how wicked I have been!”

“Wicked? What do you mean?” asked Janet, puzzled at her companion’s strange behaviour.

Nellie stood silent, and Janet went on,

“But I feel, I can’t help feeling that it is to you he owes his life—to you——”

“Be quiet!” cried Nellie. “Are you engaged now?”

“I—I don’t know.”

“Does he still love you?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? Why did you keep me in the dark? Why did you tempt me?”

“Indeed, I don’t understand.”

“I didn’t know he had told you. I only thought he had a fancy— Oh, and I loved him too! I did indeed!”

“I know, dear,” said Janet; “and so, when you had been so brave, and I so cowardly——”

“Stop!” cried Nellie again, and as she spoke, the door opened and Dale Bannister came in. He was fresh back from London, and had ridden over to see Nellie.

He stood and looked in surprise from one to the



## A VILLAIN UNMASKED

other. There was evidently something more than an afternoon call going on.

Nellie greeted his coming almost gladly.

"Ah, you are here? Then I can tell you. I can't bear it any longer. Oh, Dale, I didn't know you had told her. Indeed I didn't, or I would never have done it;" and, carried away by her emotion, she fell on her knees before him.

"Why, Nellie, what in the world's the matter?"

"I have been wicked," she went on quickly, clinging to his hand. "I have deceived you. I have told you lies. Oh, how wicked I have been!"

Dale looked inquiringly at Janet, but she shook her head in bewilderment.

"Well, Nellie, let's sit down quietly and hear the villainy. What is it?"

She refused to let him raise her, and went on, as she was, on her knees.

"I didn't mean it at first. I didn't think of it, but when I found you all thought it, and—and you were pleased, Dale, I couldn't help it."

Dale saw the only chance of arriving at the truth was not to interrupt. He signed to Janet to keep silence.

"I came up meaning to warn you. I was afraid for you. I saw you standing by the tree, and I was running towards you, and all of a sudden, I saw him, and the pistol, and——"

She paused and drooped her head. Dale pressed her hand and said,

"Well, Nellie?"

"I was afraid," she said, "and I turned and began to run away, and as I was running, it hit me."



## A CHANGE OF AIR

And, her confession ended, she sank into a little weebegone heap on the floor at his feet.

Dale understood now. She had been tempted by the hope of winning his love through his gratitude, and had not refused the false glory they all thrust upon her. Now she had heard her hopes were vain, that they had been vain even before that night, and in the misery of sin, and useless sin, she lay crying at his feet, not daring to look up at him.

He stood there awkwardly, as a man stands when he feels more moved than he allows himself to show.

“Poor child!” he said, with a break in his voice. “Poor child!”

Janet caught him by the arm.

“What does she say? That she didn’t save you?” she whispered eagerly. “That she was running away?”

Dale nodded, and Janet fell down beside Nellie, embracing her, and saying, half-laughing, half-crying, “Oh, Nellie, how sweet, how sweet of you to have been a coward too!”



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A VISION

THE lawn at Dirkham Grange was a gay scene. The Institute was opened, the luncheon consumed, the Royal Duke gone, full to the last of graciousness, though the poor fellow was hungry for solitude and cigars; and now the society of the county was unbending in friendly condescension to the society of the town, and talking the whole thing over under the trees and beside the bright flower-beds. Lord Cransford, between Janet and Dale, mingled praises of the ode with congratulations on the engagement; no one would have guessed that he shared a son's disappointment. The Mayor indifferently dissembled his exultation over the whisper of a knighthood which a hint from His Royal Highness had set running through the company. Mrs. Johnstone sat placidly in an arm-chair, the ruby velvet spread in careful folds, while Sir Harry Fulmer paid her compliments, and wondered where his wife was, and how soon they might go; and his wife walked with the Squire, declaring in her impetuous way that Nellie Fane's deceit was the most beautiful and touching thing she had ever heard of, whereat the Squire tugged his whisker, and said that nobody was disposed to be hard on her. Mrs. Roberts had made her first public appearance, diligently attended by Dr. Spink, who said, but was disbelieved in saying, that she still needed constant care. Nellie Fane herself had been persuaded to come, on a promise that the



## A CHANGE OF AIR

Mayor should not be allowed to reopen the subject of the testimonial ; and Arthur Angell, in whose breast hope was once more a sojourner, had led her to a retired walk, and was reading to her a set of verses, called "Love's Crime ;" and Nellie shook her head, saying that there was no inducement to be good, if every one conspired to pet and pamper the wicked.

Philip Hume sat alone under a spreading tree, looking on, and talking to nobody. The bustle of the morning and the sumptuous midday meal worked together with the warm afternoon air and the distant sounds of the yeomanry band to make him a little drowsy, and he watched the people walking to and fro and heard their chatter in a half-wakeful, half-sleeping state. And, strange as it seems in this work-a-day sceptical age, he fell into a sort of trance, and visions of what should be were vouchsafed to him, and if the visions were not true, at least they had a look of truth.

He saw a man, handsome still, for all that his thick hair was a little thinned by time and his waistcoat was broadening, and the man read in a mellow voice lines which Philip did not hear very plainly, about the greatness of England, the glory of the Throne, and the calmer judgment of circling years tempering the heat of youth. Then a stately dame touched him gently on the shoulder, saying that the verses were magnificent, but the carriage waited to take him to the *levée* ; and he rose to go with a smile, not seeming to notice a pale ghost, that clenched impotent shadowy hands in wrath and with a scowl shrank away. Suddenly, across this vision, came the form of Mrs. Hodge, white-haired, but cheerful and buxom as of yore, and she



## A VISION

said, "Well, Hume, she's made Arthur a happy man at last;" and the Mayor, who somehow happened to be there, wearing on his breast a large placard, inscribed "Sir James Hedger, Knight," added, quite in his old way, "We were all wrong, Mr. Hume, sir, except you, sir, beggin' your pardon." Then the Squire's voice broke in, as though in the course of an argument, and declared that it was nonsense to attribute Dale's change of views to anything except growing wisdom; and the phantom of Colonel Smith, a copy of *The Clarion* in his hand, answered "Bosh!" And a crowd of quite indistinguishable well-dressed shades gathered round the Colonel, and Philip heard them talking about the inevitable gravitation of culture and intelligence. But the Colonel still answered "Bosh!" and Philip did not hear the end of the matter, nor where the truth of it lay; for presently all the forms passed away, and he saw a little room, a little dingy room, and a grey-haired slouching fellow in an old coat, smoking an old pipe and scribbling on foolscap, scribbling away far into the night, and then sitting and musing for a solitary half-hour in front of his dying fire before he went to bed. There was something in this figure that made Philip curious, and he went nearer and looked. Hush! It was himself, and—

He awoke with a start. Dale was smiling down on him with his old friendly smile, and saying to Janet Delane,

"We shall never let this old chap leave us for long, shall we, Jan?"







A MAN OF MARK







# A MAN OF MARK

## CHAPTER I

### THE MOVEMENT AND THE MAN

IN the year 1884 the Republic of Aureataland was certainly not in a flourishing condition. Although most happily situated (it lies on the coast of South America, rather to the north—I mustn't be more definite), and gifted with an extensive territory, nearly as big as Yorkshire, it had yet failed to make that material progress which had been hoped by its founders. It is true that the state was still in its infancy, being an offshoot from another and larger realm, and having obtained the boon of freedom and self-government only as recently as 1871, after a series of political convulsions of a violent character, which may be studied with advantage in the well-known history of "The Making of Aureataland," by a learned professor of the Jeremiah P. Jecks University in the United States of America. This profound historian is, beyond all question, accurate in attributing the chief share in the national movement to the energy and ability of the first President of Aureataland, his Excellency, President Marcus W. Whittingham, a native of Virginia. Having enjoyed a personal friendship (not, unhappily, extended to public affairs) with that talented man, as will subsequently appear, I have great pleasure in publicly indorsing the professor's eulo-



## A MAN OF MARK

gium. Not only did the President bring Aureataland into being, but he moulded her whole constitution. "It was his genius" (as the professor observes with propriety) "which was fired with the idea of creating a truly modern state, instinct with the progressive spirit of the Anglo-Saxon race. It was his genius which cast aside the worn-out traditions of European dominion, and taught his fellow-citizens that they were, if not all by birth, yet one and all by adoption, the sons of freedom." Any mistakes in the execution of this fine conception must be set down to the fact that the President's great powers were rather the happy gift of nature than the result of culture. To this truth he was himself in no way blind, and he was accustomed to attribute his want of a liberal education to the social ruin brought upon his family by the American Civil War, and to the dislocation thereby produced in his studies. As the President was, when I had the honour of making his acquaintance in the year 1880, fifty years old if he was a day, this explanation hardly agrees with dates, unless it is to be supposed that the President was still pursuing his education when the war began, being then of the age of thirty-five or thereabouts.

Starting under the auspices of such a gifted leader, and imbued with so noble a zeal for progress, Aureataland was, at the beginning of her history as a nation, the object of many fond and proud hopes. But in spite of the blaze of glory in which her sun had risen (to be seen duly reflected in the professor's work), her prosperity, as I have said, was not maintained. The country was well suited for agriculture and grazing, but the population—a very queer mixture of races—was indolent, and more given to



## THE MOVEMENT AND THE MAN

keeping holidays and festivals than to honest labour. Most of them were unintelligent; those who were intelligent made their living out of those who weren't, a method of subsistence satisfactory to the individual, but adding little to the aggregate of national wealth. Only two classes made fortunes of any size, Government officials and bar-keepers, and even in their case the wealth was not great, looked at by an English or American standard. Production was slack, invention at a standstill, and taxation heavy. I suppose the President's talents were more adapted to founding a state in the shock and turmoil of war, than to the dull details of administration; and although he was nominally assisted by a cabinet of three ministers and an assembly comprising twenty-five members, it was on his shoulders that the real work of government fell. On him, therefore, the moral responsibility must also rest—a burden the President bore with a cheerfulness and equanimity almost amounting to unconsciousness.

I first set foot in Aureataland in March, 1880, when I was landed on the beach by a boat from the steamer, at the capital town of Whittingham. I was a young man, entering on my twenty-sixth year, and full of pride at finding myself at so early an age sent out to fill the responsible position of manager at our Aureataland branch. The directors of the bank were then pursuing what may without unfairness be called an adventurous policy, and, in response to the urgent entreaties and glowing exhortations of the President, they had decided on establishing a branch at Whittingham. I commanded a certain amount of interest on the board, inasmuch as the chairman owed my father a sum



## A MAN OF MARK

of money, too small to mention but too large to pay, and when, led by the youthful itch for novelty, I applied for the post I succeeded in obtaining my wish, at a salary of a hundred dollars a month. I am sorry to say that in the course of a later business dealing the balance of obligation shifted from the chairman to my father, an unhappy event which deprived me of my hold on the company and seriously influenced my conduct in later days. When I arrived in Aureataland the bank had been open some six months, under the guidance of Mr. Thomas Jones, a steady-going old clerk, who was in future to act as chief (and indeed only) cashier under my orders.

I found Whittingham a pleasant little city of about five thousand inhabitants, picturesquely situated on a fine bay, at the spot where the river Marcus debouched into the ocean. The town was largely composed of Government buildings and hotels, but there was a street of shops of no mean order, and a handsome square, called the "Piazza 1871," embellished with an equestrian statue of the President. Round about this national monument were a large number of seats, and, hard by, a *café* and band stand. Here, I soon found, was the centre of life in the afternoons and evenings. Going along a fine avenue of trees for half a mile or so, you came to the "Golden House," the President's official residence, an imposing villa of white stone with a gilt statue of Aureataland, a female figure sitting on a plowshare, and holding a sword in the right hand, and a cornucopia in the left. By her feet lay what was apparently a badly planed cannon ball; this, I learned, was a nugget, and from its presence and the name of the palace,



## THE MOVEMENT AND THE MAN

I gathered that the president had once hoped to base the prosperity of his young republic on the solid foundation of mineral wealth. This hope had been long abandoned.

I have always hated hotels, so I lost no time in looking round for lodgings suitable to my means, and was fortunate enough to obtain a couple of rooms in the house occupied by a Catholic priest, Father Jacques Bonchrétien. He was a very good fellow, and, though we did not become intimate, I could always rely on his courtesy and friendly services. Here I lived in great comfort at an expense of fifty dollars a month, and I soon found that my spare fifty made me a well-to-do man in Whittingham. Accordingly I had the *entrée* of all the best houses, including the Golden House, and a very pleasant little society we had; occasional dances, frequent dinners, and plenty of lawn tennis and billiards prevented me feeling the tedium I had somewhat feared, and the young ladies of Whittingham did their best to solace my exile. As for business, I found the bank doing a small business, but a tolerably satisfactory one, and, if we made some bad debts, we got high interest on the good ones, so that, one way or another, I managed to send home pretty satisfactory reports, and time passed on quietly enough in spite of certain manifestations of discontent among the population. These disturbing phenomena were first brought prominently to my notice at the time when I became involved in the fortunes of the Aureataland national debt, and as all my story turns on this incident, it perhaps is a fit subject for a new chapter.



## CHAPTER II

### A FINANCIAL EXPEDIENT

WHEN our branch was established at Whittingham there had been an arrangement made between ourselves and the Government, by the terms of which we were to have the Government business, and to occupy, in fact, much that quasi-official position enjoyed by the Bank of England at home. As a *quid pro quo*, the bank was to lend to the Republic the sum of five hundred thousand dollars, at six per cent. The President was at the time floating a loan of one million dollars for the purpose of works at the harbour of Whittingham. This astute ruler had, it seemed, hit on the plan of instituting public works on a large scale as a corrective to popular discontent, hoping thereby not only to develop trade, but also to give employment to many persons who, if unoccupied, became centres of agitation. Such at least was the official account of his policy; whether it was the true one I saw reason to doubt later on. As regards this loan, my office was purely ministerial. The arrangements were duly made, the proper guarantees given, and in June, 1880, I had the pleasure of handing over to the President the five hundred thousand dollars. I learned from him on that occasion that, to his great gratification, the balance of the loan had been taken up.

“We shall make a start at once, sir,” said the President, in his usual confident but quiet way. “In two years Whittingham harbour will walk over



## A FINANCIAL EXPEDIENT

the world. Don't be afraid about your interest. Your directors never made a better investment."

I thanked his Excellency, accepted a cigar, and withdrew with a peaceful mind. I had no responsibility in the matter, and cared nothing whether the directors got their interest or not. I was, however, somewhat curious to know who had taken up the rest of the loan, a curiosity which was not destined to be satisfied for some time.

The works were begun and the interest was paid, but I cannot say that the harbour progressed rapidly; in fact, I doubt if more than one hundred thousand dollars ever found their way into the pockets of contractors or workmen over the job. The President had some holes dug and some walls built; having reached that point, about two years after the interview above recorded he suddenly drew off the few labourers still employed, and matters came to a dead stop.

It was shortly after this occurrence that I was honoured with an invitation to dine at the Golden House. It was in the month of July, 1882. Needless to say, I accepted the invitation, not only because it was in the nature of a command, but also because the President gave uncommonly good dinners, and, although a bachelor (in Aureataland, at all events), had as well ordered a household as I have ever known. My gratification was greatly increased when, on my arrival, I found myself the only guest, and realised that the President considered my society in itself enough for an evening's entertainment. It did cross my mind that this might mean business, and I thought it none the worse for that.

We dined in the famous veranda, the scene of so



## A MAN OF MARK

many brilliant Whittingham functions. The dinner was beyond reproach, the wines perfection. The President was a charming companion. Though not, as I have hinted, a man of much education, he had had a wide experience of life, and had picked up a manner at once quiet and cordial, which set me completely at my ease. Moreover, he paid me the compliment, always so sweet to youth, of treating me as a man of the world. With condescending confidence he told me many tales of his earlier days; and as he had been everywhere and done everything where and which a man ought not to be and do, his conversation was naturally most interesting.

"I am not holding myself up as an example," he said, after one of his most unusual anecdotes. "I can only hope that my public services will be allowed to weigh in the balance against my private frailties."

He said this with some emotion.

"Even your Excellency," said I, "may be content to claim in that respect the same indulgence as Cæsar and Henri Quatre."

"Quite so," said the President. "I suppose they were not exactly—eh?"

"I believe not," I answered, admiring the President's readiness, for he certainly had a very dim notion who either of them was.

Dinner was over and the table cleared before the President seemed inclined for serious conversation. Then he called for cigars, and pushing them toward me said :

"Take one, and fill your glass. Don't believe people who tell you not to drink and smoke at the same time. Wine is better without smoke, and



## A FINANCIAL EXPEDIENT

smoke is better without wine, but the combination is better than either separately."

I obeyed his commands, and we sat smoking and sipping in silence for some moments. Then the President said, suddenly:

"Mr. Martin, this country is in a perilous condition."

"Good God, your Excellency!" said I, "do you refer to the earthquake?" (There had been a slight shock a few days before.)

"No, sir," he replied, "to the finances. The harbour works have proved far more expensive than I anticipated. I hold in my hand the engineer's certificate that nine hundred and three thousand dollars have been actually expended on them, and they are not finished—not by any means finished."

They certainly were not; they were hardly begun.

"Dear me," I ventured to say, "that seems a good deal of money, considering what there is to show for it."

"You cannot doubt the certificate, Mr. Martin," said the President.

I did doubt the certificate, and should have liked to ask what fee the engineer had received. But I hastily said it was, of course, beyond suspicion.

"Yes," said he steadily, "quite beyond suspicion. You see, Mr. Martin, in my position I am compelled to be liberal. The Government cannot set other employers the example of grinding men down by low wages. However, reasons apart, there is the fact. We cannot go on without more money; and I may tell you, in confidence, that the political situation makes it imperative we should go on."



## A MAN OF MARK

Not only is my personal honour pledged, but the Opposition, Mr. Martin, led by the colonel, is making itself obnoxious—yes, I may say very obnoxious.”

“The colonel, sir,” said I, with a freedom engendered of dining, “is a beast.”

“Well,” said the President, with a tolerant smile, “the colonel, unhappily for the country, is no true patriot. But he is powerful; he is rich; he is, under myself alone, in command of the army. And, moreover, I believe he stands well with the signorina. The situation, in fact, is desperate. I must have money, Mr. Martin. Will your directors make me a new loan?”

I knew very well the fate that would attend any such application. The directors were already decidedly uneasy about their first loan; shareholders had asked awkward questions, and the chairman had found no small difficulty in showing that the investment was likely to prove either safe or remunerative. Again, only a fortnight before, the Government had made a formal application to me on the same subject. I cabled the directors, and received a prompt reply in the single word “Tootsums,” which in our code meant, “Must absolutely and finally decline to entertain any applications.” I communicated the contents of the cable to Señor Don Antonio de la Casabianca, the Minister of Finance, who had, of course, communicated them in turn to the President.

I ventured to remind his Excellency of these facts. He heard me with silent attention.

“I fear,” I concluded, “therefore, that it is impossible for me to be of any assistance to your Excellency.”



## A FINANCIAL EXPEDIENT

He nodded, and gave a slight sigh. Then, with an air of closing the subject, he said:

"I suppose the directors are past reason. Help yourself to a brandy and soda."

"Allow me to mix one for you, sir," I answered.

While I was preparing our beverages he remained silent. When I had sat down again he said:

"You occupy a very responsible position here for so young a man, Mr. Martin—not beyond your merits, I am sure."

I bowed.

"They leave you a pretty free hand, don't they?"

I replied that as far as routine business went I did much as seemed good in my own eyes.

"Routine business? including investments, for instance?" he asked.

"Yes," said I; "investments in the ordinary course of business—discounting bills and putting money out on loan and mortgage over here. I place the money, and merely notify the people at home of what I have done."

"A most proper confidence to repose in you," the President was good enough to say. "Confidence is the life of business; you must trust a man. It would be absurd to make you send home the bills, and deeds, and certificate, and what not. Of course they wouldn't do that."

Though this was a statement, somehow it also sounded like a question, so I answered:

"As a rule they do me the compliment of taking my word. The fact is, they are, as your Excellency says, obliged to trust somebody."



## A MAN OF MARK

“Exactly as I thought. And you sometimes have large sums to place?”

At this point, notwithstanding my respect for the President, I began to smell a rat.

“Oh, no, sir,” I replied, “usually very small. Our business is not so extensive as we could wish.”

“Whatever,” said the President, looking me straight in the face, “whatever may be usual, at this moment you have a large sum—a very respectable sum—of money in your safe at the bank, waiting for investment.”

“How the devil do you know that?” I cried.

“Mr. Martin! It is no doubt my fault; I am too prone to ignore etiquette; but you forget yourself.”

I hastened to apologise, although I was pretty certain the President was contemplating a queer transaction, if not flat burglary.

“Ten thousand pardons, your Excellency, for my most unbecoming tone, but may I ask how you became possessed of this information?”

“Jones told me,” he said simply.

As it would not have been polite to express the surprise I felt at Jones’ simplicity in choosing such a *confidant*, I held my peace.

“Yes,” continued the President, “owing to the recent sales of your real property in this country (sales due, I fear, to a want of confidence in my administration), you have at this moment a sum of three hundred thousand dollars in the bank safe. Now (don’t interrupt me, please), the experience of a busy life teaches me that commercial reputation and probity depend on results, not on methods. Your directors have a prejudice against me and my



## A FINANCIAL EXPEDIENT

Government. That prejudice you, with your superior opportunities for judgment, cannot share. You will serve your employers best by doing for them what they haven't the sense and courage to do for themselves. I propose that you should assume the responsibility of lending me this money. The transaction will redound to the profit of the bank. It shall also," he added slowly, "redound to your profit."

I began to see my way. But there were difficulties.

"What am I to tell the directors?" I asked.

"You will make the usual return of investments and debts outstanding, mortgages, loans on approved security—but you know better than I do."

"False returns, your Excellency means?"

"They will no doubt be formally inaccurate," the President admitted.

"What if they ask for proofs?" said I.

"Sufficient unto the day," said the President.

"You have rather surprised me, sir," I said, "but I am most anxious to oblige you, and to forward the welfare of Aureataland. There are, however, two points which occur to me. First, how am I to be insured against not getting my interest? That I must have."

"Quite so," he interrupted. "And the second point I can anticipate. It is, what token of my gratitude for your timely assistance can I prevail on you to accept?"

"Your Excellency's knowledge of human nature is surprising."

"Kindly give me your attention, Mr. Martin, and I will try to satisfy both your very reasonable requirements. You have \$300,000; those you will



## A MAN OF MARK

hand over to me, receiving in return Government six per cent. bonds for that amount. I will then hand back to you \$65,000 ; 45,000 you will retain as security for your interest. In the event of any failure on the part of Aureataland to meet her obligations honourably, you will pay the interest on the whole 300,000 out of that sum. That secures you for more than two years against absolute failure of interest, which in reality you need not fear. Till the money is wanted you will have the use of it. The remaining 20,000 I shall beg of you to accept as your commission, or rather as a token of my esteem. Two hundred thousand absolutely—45,000 as long as Aureataland pays interest! You must admit I deal with you as one gentleman with another, Mr. Martin. In the result, your directors get their interest, I get my loan, you get your bonus. We are all benefited ; no one is hurt! All this is affected at the cost of a harmless stratagem.”

I was full of admiration. The scheme was very neat, and, as far as the President and myself were concerned, he had been no more than just in pointing out its advantages. As for the directors, they would probably get their interest ; anyhow, they would get it for two years. There was risk, of course. A demand for evidence of my alleged investments, or a sudden order to realise a heavy sum at short notice, would bring the house about my ears. But I did not anticipate this *contretemps*, and at the worst I had my twenty thousand dollars and could make myself scarce therewith. These calculations were quite correct at the moment, but I upset them afterward by spending the dollars and by contracting a tie which made flight from Aureataland a distasteful alternative.



## A FINANCIAL EXPEDIENT

“ Well, Mr. Martin,” said the President, “ do you agree ? ”

I still hesitated. Was it a moral scruple ? Probably not, unless, indeed, prudence and morality are the same thing.

The President rose and put his hand on my shoulder.

“ Better say yes. I might take it, you know, and cause you to disappear—believe me, with reluctance, Mr. Martin. It is true I shouldn’t like this course. It would perhaps make my position here untenable. But not having the money would certainly make it untenable.”

I saw the force of this argument, and gulping down my brandy and soda, I said :

“ I can refuse your Excellency nothing.”

“ Then take your hat and come along to the bank,” said he.

This was sharp work.

“ Your Excellency does not mean to take the money now—to-night ? ” I exclaimed.

“ Not to take, Mr. Martin—to receive it from you. We have made our bargain. What is the objection to carrying it out promptly ? ”

“ But I must have the bonds. They must be prepared, sir.”

“ They are here,” he said, taking a bundle from the drawer of a writing-table. “ Three hundred thousand dollars, six per cent. stock, signed by myself, and countersigned by Don Antonio. Take your hat and come along.”

I did as I was bid.



## CHAPTER III

### AN EXCESS OF AUTHORITY

IT was a beautiful moonlight night, and Whittingham was looking her best as we made our way along the avenue leading to the Piazza 1871. The President walked briskly, silent but serene; I followed, the trouble in my mind reflected in a somewhat hang-dog air, and I was not much comforted when the President broke the stillness of the night by saying:

“You have set your foot on the first rung of the ladder that leads to fame and wealth, Mr. Martin.”

I was rather afraid I had set it on the first rung of the ladder that leads to the gallows. But there the foot was; what the ladder turned out to be was in the hands of the gods; so I threw off care, and as we entered the Piazza I pointed to the statue and said:

“Behold my inspiring example, your Excellency.”

“By Jove, yes!” he replied; “I make the most of my opportunities.”

I knew he regarded me as one of his opportunities, and was making the most of me. This is not a pleasant point of view to regard one's self from, so I changed the subject, and said:

“Shall we call for Don Antonio?”

“Why?”



## AN EXCESS OF AUTHORITY

“Well, as he’s Minister of Finance, I thought perhaps his presence would make the matter more regular.”

“If the presence of the President,” said that official, “can’t make a matter regular, I don’t know what can. Let him sleep on. Isn’t his signature on the bonds enough?”

What could I do? I made one more weak objection:

“What shall we tell Jones?”

“What shall *we* tell Jones?” he echoed. “Really, Mr. Martin, you must use your discretion as to what you tell your employees. You can hardly expect me to tell Jones anything, beyond that it’s a fine morning.”

We had now reached the bank, which stood in Liberty Street, a turning out of the Piazza. I took out my key, unlocked the door, and we entered together. We passed into my inner sanctum, where the safe stood.

“What’s it in?” asked the President.

“United States bonds, and bills on New York and London,” I replied.

“Good,” said he. “Let me look.”

I undid the safe, and took out the securities. He examined them carefully, placing each after due scrutiny in a small handbag, in which he had brought down the bonds I was to receive. I stood by, holding a shaded candle. At this moment a voice cried from the door:

“If you move you’re dead men!”

I started and looked up. The President looked up without starting. There was dear old Jones, descended from his upper chamber, where he and Mrs. Jones resided. He was clad only in his night-



## A MAN OF MARK

shirt, and was levelling a formidable gun full at the august head of his Excellency.

"Ah, Mr. Jones," said the latter, "it's a fine morning."

"Good Heavens, the President!" cried Jones; "and Mr. Martin! Why, what on earth, gentlemen——"

The President gently waved one hand toward me, as if to say, "Mr. Martin will explain," and went on placing his securities in the bag.

In face of this crisis my hesitation left me.

"I have received a cable from Europe, Jones," said I, "instructing me to advance a sum of money to his Excellency; I am engaged in carrying out these instructions."

"Cable?" said Jones. "Where is it?"

"In my pocket," said I, feeling for it. "No! Why I must have left it at the Golden House."

The President came to my assistance.

"I saw it on the table just before we started. Though I presume Mr. Jones has no *right*——"

"None at all," I said briskly.

"Yet, as a matter of concession, Mr. Martin will no doubt show it to him to-morrow?"

"Strictly as a matter of concession perhaps I will, though I am bound to say that I am surprised at your manner, Mr. Jones."

Jones looked sadly puzzled.

"It's all irregular, sir," said he.

"Hardly more so than your costume!" said the President pleasantly.

Jones was a modest man, and being thus made aware of the havoc the draught was playing with his airy covering, he hastily closed the door, and said to me appealingly:



## AN EXCESS OF AUTHORITY

“It’s all right, sir, I suppose?”

“Perfectly right,” said I.

“But highly confidential,” added the President. “And you will put me under a personal obligation, Mr. Jones, and at the same time fulfil your duty to your employers, if you preserve silence till the transaction is officially announced. A man who serves me does not regret it.”

Here he was making the most of another opportunity—Jones this time.

“Enough of this,” I said. “I will go over the matter in the morning, and meanwhile hadn’t you better go back to——”

“Mrs. Jones,” interjected his Excellency. “And mind, silence, Mr. Jones!”

He walked up to Jones as he said this, and looked hard at him.

“Silent men prosper best, and live longest, Mr. Jones.”

Jones looked into his steely eyes, and suddenly fell all of a tremble.

The President was satisfied. He abruptly pushed him out of the room, and we heard his shambling steps going up the staircase.

His Excellency turned to me, and said with apparent annoyance:

“You leave a great deal to me, Mr. Martin.”

He had certainly done more than tell Jones it was a fine morning. But I was too much troubled to thank him; I was thinking of the cable. The President divined my thoughts, and said:

“You must prepare that cable.”

“Yes,” I replied; “that would reassure him. But I haven’t had much practice in that sort of thing, and I don’t quite know——”



## A MAN OF MARK

The President scribbled a few words on a bit of paper, and said :

“Take that to the post office and they’ll give you the proper form ; you can fill it up.”

Certainly some things go easily if the head of the state is your fellow-criminal.

“And now, Mr. Martin, it grows late. I have my securities ; you have your bonds. We have won over Jones. All goes well. Aureataland is saved. You have made your fortune, for there lie your sixty-five thousand dollars. And, in fine, I am much obliged to you. I will not trouble you to attend me on my return. Good-night, Mr. Martin.”

He went out, and I threw myself down in my office chair, and sat gazing at the bonds he had left me. I wondered whether he had merely made a tool of me ; whether I could trust him ; whether I had done well to sacrifice my honesty, relying on his promises. And yet there lay my reward ; and, as purely moral considerations did not trouble me, I soon arose, put the Government bonds and the sixty-five thousand dollars in securities in the safe, locked up everything, and went home to my lodgings. As I went in it was broad daylight, for the clock had gone five, and I met Father Jacques sallying forth. He had already breakfasted, and was on his way to administer early consolation to the flower-women in the Piazza. He stopped me with a grieved look, and said :

“Ah, my friend, these are untimely hours.”

I saw I was labouring under an unjust suspicion—a most revolting thing.

“I have only just come from the bank,” I said. “I had to dine at the Golden House and afterward returned to finish up a bit of work.”



## AN EXCESS OF AUTHORITY

“ Ah ! that is well,” he cried. “ It is, then, the industrious and not the idle apprentice I meet ? ” referring to a series of famous prints with which my room was decorated, a gift from my father on my departure.

I nodded and passed on, saying to myself : “ Deuced industrious, indeed. Not many men have done such a night’s work as I have.”

And that was how my fortunes became bound up with those of the Aureataland national debt.



## CHAPTER IV

### OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION

AFTER the incidents above recorded, things went on quietly enough for some months. I had a serious talk with Jones, reproaching him gravely for his outrageous demeanour. He capitulated abjectly on being shown the cable, which was procured in the manner kindly indicated by the President. The latter had perhaps been in too great a hurry with his heavy guns, for his hint of violence had rather stirred than allayed Jones' apprehensions. If there were nothing to conceal, why should his Excellency not stick at murder to hide it? However, I explained to him the considerations of high policy, dictating inviolable secrecy, and justifying a somewhat arbitrary way of dealing with a trusted official; and the marked graciousness with which Jones was received when he met the President at the ministry of finance on current business went far to obliterate his unpleasant recollections. I further bound him to my fortunes by obtaining for him a rise of salary from the directors, "in consequence of the favourable report of his conduct received from Mr. Martin."

Peaceful as matters seemed, I was not altogether at ease. To begin with the new loan did not apparently at all improve the financial position of Aureataland. Desolation still reigned on the scene of the harbour works; there was the usual difficulty in paying salaries and meeting current expenditure.



## OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION

The President did not invite my confidence as to the disposal of his funds ; indeed before long I was alarmed to see a growing coldness in his manner, which I considered at once ungrateful and menacing ; and when the half-year came round he firmly refused to disburse more than half the amount of interest due on the second loan, thus forcing me to make an inroad on my reserve of forty-five thousand dollars. He gave me many good reasons for this course of conduct, dwelling chiefly on the necessary unproductiveness of public works in their early stages, and confidently promising full payment with arrears next time. Nevertheless, I began to see that I must face the possibility of a continual drain on resources that I had fondly hoped would be available for my own purposes for a considerable time at least. Thus one thing and another contributed to open a breach between his Excellency and myself, and, although I never ceased to feel his charm as a private companion, my distrust of him as a ruler, and, I may add, as a fellow-conspirator, steadily deepened.

Other influences were at this time—for we have now reached the beginning of 1883—at work in the same direction. Rich in the possession of my “bonus,” I had plunged even more freely than before into the gayeties of Whittingham, and where I was welcome before, I was now a doubly honoured guest. I had also taken to play on a somewhat high scale, and it was my reputation as a daring gambler that procured me the honour of an acquaintance with the signorina, the lady to whom the President had referred during his interview with me ; and my acquaintance with the signorina was very rich in results.



## A MAN OF MARK

This lady was, after the President, perhaps the best-known person in Aureataland—best known, that is, by name and face and fame—for her antecedents and circumstances were wrapped in impenetrable mystery. When I arrived in the country the Signorina Christina Nugent had been settled there about a year. She had appeared originally as a member of an operatic company, which had paid a visit to our National Theatre from the United States. The company passed on its not very brilliant way, but the signorina remained behind. It was said she had taken a fancy to Whittingham, and, being independent of her profession, had determined to make a sojourn there. At any rate, there she was ; whether she took a fancy to Whittingham, or whether someone in Whittingham took a fancy to her, remained in doubt. She established herself in a pretty villa closely adjoining the Golden House ; it stood opposite the presidential grounds, commanding a view of that stately inclosure ; and here she dwelt, under the care of a lady whom she called “ Aunt,” known to the rest of the world as Mrs. Carrington. The title “ Signorina ” was purely professional ; for all I know the name “ Nugent ” was equally a creature of choice ; but, anyhow, the lady herself never professed to be anything but English, and openly stated that she retained her title simply because it was more musical than that of “ Miss.” The old lady and the young one lived together in great apparent amity, and certainly in the utmost material comfort ; for they probably got through more money than anyone in the town, and there always seemed to be plenty more where that came from. Where it did come from was, I need hardly say, a



## OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION

subject of keen curiosity in social circles; and when I state that the signorina was now about twenty-three years of age, and of remarkably prepossessing appearance, it will be allowed that we in Whittingham were no worse than other people if we entertained some uncharitable suspicions. The signorina, however, did not make the work of detection at all easy. She became almost at once a leading figure in society; her *salon* was the meeting-place of all parties and most sets; she received many gracious attentions from the Golden House, but none on which slander could definitely settle. She was also frequently the hostess of members of the Opposition, and of no one more often than their leader, Colonel George McGregor, a gentleman of Scotch extraction, but not pronouncedly national characteristics, who had attained a high position in the land of his adoption; for not only did he lead the Opposition in politics, but he was also second in command of the army. He entered the chamber as one of the President's nominees (for the latter had reserved to himself power to nominate five members), but at the time of which I write the colonel had deserted his former chief, and, secure in his popularity with the forces, defied the man by whose help he had risen. Naturally, the President disliked him, a feeling I cordially shared. But his Excellency's disapproval did not prevent the signorina receiving McGregor with great cordiality, though here again with no more *empressement* than his position seemed to demand.

I have as much curiosity as my neighbours, and I was proportionately gratified when the doors of "Mon Repos," as the signorina called her residence,



## A MAN OF MARK

were opened to me. My curiosity, I must confess, was not unmixed with other feelings; for I was a young man at heart, though events had thrown sobering responsibilities upon me, and the sight of the signorina in her daily drives was enough to inspire a thrill even in the soul of a bank manager. She was certainly very beautiful—a tall, fair girl, with straight features and laughing eyes. I shall not attempt more description, because all such descriptions sound commonplace, and the signorina was, even by the admission of her enemies, at least very far from commonplace. It must suffice to say that, like Father O'Flynn, she "had such a way with her" that all of us men in Aureataland, old and young, rich and poor, were at her feet, or ready to be there on the least encouragement. She was, to my thinking, the very genius of health, beauty, and gayety; and she put the crowning touch to her charms by very openly and frankly soliciting and valuing the admiration she received. For, after all, it's only exceptional men who are attracted by *difficile* beauty; to most of us a gracious reception of our timid advances is the most subtle temptation of the devil.

It may be supposed, then, that I thought my money very well invested when it procured me an invitation to "Mon Repos," where the lady of the house was in the habit of allowing a genteel amount of gambling among her male friends. She never played herself, but stood and looked on with much interest. On occasion she would tempt fortune by the hand of a chosen deputy, and nothing could be prettier or more artistic than her behaviour. She was just eager enough for a girl unused to the excitement and fond of triumph, just indifferent



## OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION

enough to show that her play was merely a pastime, and the gain of the money or its loss a matter of no moment. Ah! signorina, you were a great artist.

At "Mon Repos" I soon became an habitual, and, I was fain to think, a welcome, guest. Mrs. Carrington, who entertained a deep distrust of the manners and excesses of Aureataland, was good enough to consider me eminently respectable, while the signorina was graciousness itself. I was even admitted to the select circle at the dinner party which, as a rule, preceded her Wednesday evening reception, and I was a constant figure round the little roulette board, which, of all forms of gaming, was our hostess' favourite delectation. The colonel was, not to my pleasure, an equally invariable guest, and the President himself would often honour the party with his presence, an honour we found rather expensive, for his luck at all games of skill or chance was extraordinary.

"I have always trusted Fortune," he would say, "and to me she is not fickle."

"Who would be fickle if your Excellency were pleased to trust her?" the signorina would respond, with a glance of almost fond admiration.

This sort of thing did not please McGregor. He made no concealment of the fact that he claimed the foremost place among the signorina's admirers, utterly declining to make way even for the President. The latter took his boorishness very quietly; and I could not avoid the conclusion that the President held, or thought he held, the trumps. I was, naturally, intensely jealous of both these great men, and, although I had no cause to complain of my treatment, I could not stifle some resentment



## A MAN OF MARK

at the idea that I was, after all, an outsider and not allowed a part in the real drama that was going on. My happiness was further damped by the fact that luck ran steadily against me, and I saw my bonus dwindling very rapidly. I suppose I may as well be frank, and confess that my bonus, to speak strictly, vanished within six months after I first set foot in "Mon Repos," and I found it necessary to make that temporary use of the "interest fund," which the President had indicated as open to me under the terms of our bargain. However, my uneasiness on this score was lightened when the next instalment of interest was punctually paid, and, with youthful confidence, I made little doubt that luck would turn before long.

Thus time passed on, and the beginning of 1884 found us all leading an apparently merry and untroubled life. In public affairs the temper was very different. The scarcity of money was intense, and serious murmuring had arisen when the President "squandered" his ready money in buying interest, leaving his civil servants and soldiers unpaid. This was the topic of much discussion in the press at the time, when I went up one March evening to the signorina's. I had been detained at the bank, and found the play in full swing when I came in. The signorina was taking no part in it, but sat by herself on a low lounge by the veranda window. I went up to her and made my bow.

"You spare us but little of your time, Mr. Martin," she said.

"Ah, but you have all my thoughts," I replied, for she was looking charming.

"I don't care so much about your thoughts," she



## OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION

said. Then, after a pause, she went on, "It's very hot here, come into the conservatory."

It almost looked as though she had been waiting for me, and I followed in high delight into the long, narrow glass house running parallel to the *salon*. High green plants hid us from the view of those inside, and we only heard distinctly his Excellency's voice, saying with much geniality to the colonel, "Well, you must be lucky in love, colonel," from which I concluded that the colonel was not in the vein at cards.

The signorina smiled slightly as she heard ; then she plucked a white rose, turned round, and stood facing me, slightly flushed as though with some inner excitement.

"I am afraid those two gentlemen do not love one another," she said.

"Hardly," I assented.

"And you, do you love them—or either of them?"

"I love only one person in Aureataland," I replied, as ardently as I dared.

The signorina bit her rose, glancing up at me with unfeigned amusement and pleasure. I think I have mentioned that she didn't object to honest admiration.

"Is it possible you mean me?" she said, making me a little courtesy. "I only think so because most of the Whittingham ladies would not satisfy your fastidious taste."

"No lady in the world could satisfy me except one," I answered, thinking she took it a little too lightly.

"Ah! so you say," she said. "And yet I don't suppose you would do anything for me, Mr. Martin?"



## A MAN OF MARK

"It would be my greatest happiness," I cried.

She said nothing, but stood there, biting the rose.

"Give it to me," I said; "it shall be my badge of service."

"You will serve me, then?" said she.

"For what reward?"

"Why, the rose!"

"I should like the owner too," I ventured to remark.

"The rose is prettier than the owner," she said; "and, at any rate, one thing at a time, Mr. Martin! Do you pay your servants all their wages in advance?"

My practice was so much the contrary that I really couldn't deny the force of her reasoning. She held out the rose. I seized it and pressed it close to my lips, thereby squashing it considerably.

"Dear me," said the signorina, "I wonder if I had given you the other thing whether you would have treated it so roughly."

"I'll show you in a moment," said I.

"Thank you, no, not just now," she said, showing no alarm, for she knew she was safe with me. Then she said abruptly:

"Are you a Constitutionalist or a Liberal, Mr. Martin?"

I must explain that, in the usual race for the former title, the President's party had been first at the post, and the colonel's gang (as I privately termed it) had to put up with the alternative designation. Neither name bore any relation to facts.

"Are we going to talk politics?" said I reproachfully.

"Yes, a little; you see we got to an *impasse* on the other topic. Tell me."



## OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION

“Which are you, signorina?” I asked.

I really wanted to know; so did a great many people.

She thought for a moment, and then said:

“I have a great regard for the President. He has been most kind to me. He has shown me real affection.”

“The devil he has!” I muttered.

“I beg your pardon?” said she.

“I only said, ‘Of course he has.’ The President has the usual complement of eyes.”

The signorina smiled again, but went on as if I hadn’t spoken.

“On the other hand, I cannot disguise from myself that some of his measures are not wise.”

I said I had never been able to disguise it from myself.

“The colonel, of course, is of the same opinion,” she continued. “About the debt, for instance. I believe your bank is interested in it?”

This was no secret, so I said:

“Oh, yes, to a considerable extent.”

“And you?” she asked softly.

“Oh, I am not a capitalist! no money of mine has gone into the debt.”

“No money of yours, no. But aren’t you interested in it?” she persisted.

This was rather odd. Could she know anything?

She drew nearer to me, and, laying a hand lightly on my arm, said reproachfully:

“Do you love people, and yet not trust them, Mr. Martin?”

This was exactly my state of feeling toward the signorina, but I could not say so. I was wondering how far I should be wise to trust her, and that de-



## A MAN OF MARK

pended largely on how far his Excellency had seen fit to trust her with my secrets. I finally said:

“Without disclosing other people’s secrets, signorina, I may admit that if anything went wrong with the debt my employers’ opinion of my discretion would be severely shaken.”

“Of your *discretion*,” she said, laughing. “Thank you, Mr. Martin. And you would wish that not to happen?”

“I would take a good deal of pains to prevent its happening.”

“Not less willingly if your interest and mine coincided?”

I was about to make a passionate reply when we heard the President’s voice saying:

“And where is our hostess? I should like to thank her before I go.”

“Hush,” whispered the signorina. “We must go back. You will be true to me, Mr. Martin?”

“Call me Jack,” said I idiotically.

“Then you will be true, O *Jack*?” she said, stifling a laugh.

“Till death,” said I, hoping it would not be necessary.

She gave me her hand, which I kissed with fervour, and we returned to the *salon*, to find all the players risen from the table and standing about in groups, waiting to make their bows till the President had gone through that ceremony. I was curious to hear if anything passed between him and the signorina, but I was pounced upon by Donna Antonia, the daughter of the minister of finance, who happened to be present, notwithstanding the late hour, as a guest of the signorina’s for the night. She was a handsome young lady, a Spanish bru-



## OVERTURES FROM THE OPPOSITION

nette of the approved pattern, but with manners formed at a New York boarding school, where she had undergone a training that had tempered, without destroying, her native gentility. She had distinguished me very favourably, and I was vain enough to suppose she honoured me by some jealousy of my *penchant* for the signorina.

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself in the conservatory," she said maliciously.

"We were talking business, Donna Antonia," I replied.

"Ah! business! I hear of nothing but business. There is papa gone down to the country and burying himself alive to work out some great scheme of business."

I pricked up my ears.

"Ah! what scheme is that?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know! Something about that horrid debt. But I was told not to say anything about it!"

The debt was becoming a bore. The whole air was full of it. I hastily paid Donna Antonia a few incoherent compliments, and took my leave. As I was putting on my coat Colonel McGregor joined me and, with more friendliness than he usually showed me, accompanied me down the avenue toward the Piazza. After some indifferent remarks he began:

"Martin, you and I have separate interests in some matters, but I think we have the same in others."

I knew at once what he meant; it was that debt over again!

I remained silent, and he continued:

"About the debt, for instance. You are interested in the debt?"



## A MAN OF MARK

“Somewhat,” said I. “A banker generally is interested in a debt.”

“I thought so,” said the colonel. “A time may come when we can act together. Meanwhile, keep your eye on the debt. Good-night!”

We parted at the door of his chambers in the Piazza, and I went on to my lodgings.

As I got into bed, rather puzzled and very uneasy, I damned the debt. Then, remembering that the debt was, as it seemed, for some reason a common interest to the signorina and myself, I apologised to it, and fell asleep.



## CHAPTER V

### I APPRECIATE THE SITUATION

THE flight of time brought no alleviation to the troubles of Aureataland. If an individual hard up is a pathetic sight, a nation hard up is an alarming spectacle ; and Aureataland was very hard up. I suppose somebody had some money. But the Government had none ; in consequence the Government employees had none, the officials had none, the President had none, and finally, I had none. The bank had a little—of other people's, of course—but I was quite prepared for a “run” on us any day, and had cabled to the directors to implore a remittance in cash, for our notes were at a discount humiliating to contemplate. Political strife ran high. I dropped into the House of Assembly one afternoon toward the end of May, and, looking down from the gallery, saw the colonel in the full tide of wrathful declamation. He was demanding of miserable Don Antonio when the army was to be paid. The latter sat cowering under his scorn, and would, I verily believe, have bolted out of the House had he not been nailed to his seat by the cold eye of the President, who was looking on from his box. The minister on rising had nothing to urge but vague promises of speedy payment ; but he utterly lacked the confident effrontery of his chief, and nobody was deceived by his weak protestations. I left the House in a considerable uproar, and strolled on to the house of a friend of



## A MAN OF MARK

mine, one Mme. Devarges, the widow of a French gentleman who had found his way to Whittingham from New Caledonia. Politeness demanded the assumption that he had found his way to New Caledonia owing to political troubles, but the usual cloud hung over the precise date and circumstances of his patriotic sacrifice. Madame sometimes considered it necessary to bore herself and others with denunciations of the various tyrants or would-be tyrants of France; but, apart from this pious offering on the shrine of her husband's reputation, she was a bright and pleasant little woman. I found assembled round her tea-table a merry party, including Donna Antonia, unmindful of her father's agonies, and one Johnny Carr, who deserves mention as being the only honest man in Aureataland. I speak, of course, of the place as I found it. He was a young Englishman, what they call a "cadet," of a good family, shipped off with a couple of thousand pounds to make his fortune. Land was cheap among us, and Johnny had bought an estate and settled down as a landowner. Recently he had blossomed forth as a keen Constitutionalist and a devoted admirer of the President's, and held a seat in the assembly in that interest. Johnny was not a clever man nor a wise one, but he was merry, and, as I have thought it necessary to mention, honest.

"Hallo, Johnny! Why not at the House?" said I to him. "You'll want every vote to-night. Be off and help the ministry, and take Donna Antonia with you. They're eating up the Minister of Finance."

"All right! I'm going as soon as I've had another muffin," said Johnny. "But what's the row about?"



## I APPRECIATE THE SITUATION

“Well, they want their money,” I replied; “and Don Antonio won’t give it them. Hence bad feeling.”

“Tell you what it is,” said Johnny; “he hasn’t got a——”

Here Donna Antonia struck in, rather suddenly, I thought.

“Do stop the gentleman talking politics, Mme. Devarges. They’ll spoil our tea-party.”

“Your word is law,” I said; “but I should like to know what Don Antonio hasn’t got.”

“Now do be quiet,” she rejoined; “isn’t it quite enough that he has got—a charming daughter?”

“And a most valuable one,” I replied, with a bow, for I saw that for some reason or other Donna Antonia did not mean to let me pump Johnny Carr, and I wanted to pump him.

“Don’t say another word, Mr. Carr,” she said, with a laugh. “You know you don’t know anything, do you?”

“Good Lord, no!” said Johnny.

Meanwhile Mme. Devarges was giving me a cup of tea. As she handed it to me, she said in a low voice:

“If I were his friend I should take care Johnny didn’t know anything, Mr. Martin.”

“If I were his friend I should take care he told me what he knew, Mme. Devarges,” I replied.

“Perhaps that’s what the colonel thinks,” she said. “Johnny has just been telling us how very attentive he has become. And the signorina too, I hear.”

“You don’t mean that?” I exclaimed. “But, after all, pure kindness, no doubt!”

“You have received many attentions from those



## A MAN OF MARK

quarters," she said. "No doubt you are a good judge of the motives."

"Don't, now don't be disagreeable," said I. "I came here for peace."

"Poor young man! have you lost all your money? Is it possible that you, like Don Antonio, haven't got a——"

"What is going to happen?" I asked, for Mme. Devarges often had information.

"I don't know," she said. "But if I owned national bonds, I should sell."

"Pardon me, madame; you would offer to sell." She laughed.

"Ah! I see my advice comes too late."

I did not see any need to enlighten her father. So I passed on to Donna Antonia, who had sat somewhat sulkily since her outburst. I sat down by her and said:

"Surely I haven't offended you?"

"You know you wouldn't care if you had," she said, with a reproachful but not unkind glance.

"Now, if it were the signorina——"

I never object to bowing down in the temple of Rimmon, so I said:

"Hang the signorina!"

"If I thought you meant that," said Donna Antonia, "I might be able to help you."

"Do I want help?" I asked.

"Yes," said she.

"Then suppose I do mean it?"

Donna Antonia refused to be frivolous. With a look of genuine distress she said:

"You will not let your real friends save you, Mr. Martin. You know you want help. Why don't you consider the state of your affairs?"



## I APPRECIATE THE SITUATION

"In that, at least, my friends in Whittingham are very ready to help me," I answered, with some annoyance.

"If you take it in that way," she replied sadly, "I can do nothing."

I was rather touched. Clearly she wished to be of some use to me, and for a moment I thought I might do better to tear myself free from my chains, and turn to the refuge opened to me. But I could not do this; and, thinking it would be rather mean to take advantage of her interest in me only to use it for my own purposes, I yielded to conscience and said :

"Donna Antonia, I will be straightforward with you. You can only help me if I accept your guidance? I can't do that. I am too deep in."

"Yes, you are deep in, and eager to be deeper," she said. "Well, so be it. If that is so I cannot help you."

"Thank you for your kind attempt," said I. "I shall very likely be sorry some day that I repulse it. I shall always be glad to remember that you made it."

She looked at me a moment, and said :

"We have ruined you among us."

"Mind, body, and estate?"

She made no reply, and I saw my return to flippancy wounded her. So I rose and took my leave. Johnny Carr went with me.

"Things look queer, eh, old man?" said he. "But the President will pull through in spite of the colonel and his signorina."

"Johnny," said I, "you hurt my feelings; but, still, I will give you a piece of advice."

"Drive on," said Johnny.



## A MAN OF MARK

“Marry Donna Antonia,” said I. “She’s a good girl and a clever girl, and won’t let you get drunk or robbed.”

“By Jove, that’s not a bad idea!” said he. “Why don’t you do it yourself?”

“Because I’m like you, Johnny—an ass,” I replied, and left him wondering why, if he was an ass and I was an ass, one ass should marry Donna Antonia, and not both or neither.

As I went along I bought the *Gazette*, the government organ, and read therein :

“At a Cabinet Council this afternoon, presided over by his Excellency, we understand that the arrangements connected with the national debt formed the subject of discussion. The resolutions arrived at are at present strictly confidential, but we have the best authority for stating that the measures to be adopted will have the effect of materially alleviating the present tension, and will afford unmixed satisfaction to the immense majority of the citizens of Aureataland. The President will once again be hailed as the saviour of his country.”

“I wonder if the immense majority will include me,” said I. “I think I will go and see his Excellency.”

Accordingly, the next morning I took my way to the Golden House, where I learned that the President was at the Ministry of Finance. Arriving there, I sent in my card, writing thereon a humble request for a private interview. I was ushered into Don Antonio’s room, where I found the minister himself, the President, and Johnny Carr. As I entered and the servant, on a sign from his Ex-



## I APPRECIATE THE SITUATION

cellency, placed a chair for me, the latter said rather stiffly :

“As I presume this is a business visit, Mr. Martin, it is more regular that I should receive you in the presence of one of my constitutional advisers. Mr. Carr is acting as my secretary, and you can speak freely before him.”

I was annoyed at failing in my attempt to see the President alone, but not wishing to show it, I merely bowed and said :

“I venture to intrude on your Excellency, in consequence of a letter from my directors. They inform me that, to use their words, ‘disquieting rumours’ are afloat on the exchanges in regard to the Aureataland loan, and they direct me to submit to your Excellency the expediency of giving some public notification relative to the payment of the interest falling due next month. It appears from their communication that it is apprehended that some difficulty may occur in the matter.”

“Would not this application, if necessary at all, have been more properly made to the Ministry of Finance in the first instance?” said the President. “These details hardly fall within my province.”

“I can only follow my instructions, your Excellency,” I replied.

“Have you any objection, Mr. Martin,” said the President, “to allowing myself and my advisers to see this letter?”

“I am empowered to submit it only to your Excellency’s own eye.”

“Oh, only to my eye,” said he, with an amused expression. “That was why the interview was to be private?”

“Exactly, sir,” I replied. “I intend no disre-



## A MAN OF MARK

spect to the Minister of Finance or to your secretary, sir, but I am bound by my orders."

"You are an exemplary servant, Mr. Martin, but I don't think I need trouble you about it further. Is it a cable?"

He smiled so wickedly at this question that I saw he had penetrated my little fiction. However, I only said:

"A letter, sir."

"Well, gentlemen," said he to the others, "I think we may reassure Mr. Martin. Tell your directors this, Mr. Martin: The Government does not see any need of a public notification, and none will be made. I think we agree, gentlemen, that to acknowledge the necessity of any such action would be highly derogatory. But assure them that the President has stated to you, Mr. Martin, personally, with the concurrence of his advisers, that he anticipates no difficulties in your being in a position to remit the full amount of interest to them on the proper day."

"I may assure them, sir, that the interest will be punctually paid?"

"Surely I expressed myself in a manner you could understand," said he, with the slightest emphasis on the "you." "Aureataland will meet her obligations. You will receive all your due, Mr. Martin. That is so, gentlemen?"

Don Antonio acquiesced at once. Johnny Carr, I noticed, said nothing, and fidgeted rather uneasily in his chair. I knew what the President meant. He meant, "If we don't pay, pay it out of your reserve fund." Alas, the reserve fund was considerably diminished; I had enough, and just enough, left to pay the next instalment if I paid



## I APPRECIATE THE SITUATION

none of my own debts. I felt very vicious as I saw his Excellency taking keen pleasure in the consciousness of my difficulties (for he had a shrewd notion of how the land lay), but of course I could say nothing. So I rose and bowed myself out, feeling I had gained nothing, except a very clear conviction that I should not see the color of the President's money on the next interest day. True, I could just pay myself. But what would happen next time? And if he wouldn't pay, and I couldn't pay, the game would be up. As to the original loan, it is true I had no responsibility; but then, if no interest were paid, the fact that I had applied the second loan, *my* loan, in a different manner from what I was authorised to do, and had represented myself to have done, would be inevitably discovered. And my acceptance of the bonus, my dealings with the reserve fund, my furnishing inaccurate returns of investments, all this would, I knew, look rather queer to people who didn't know the circumstances.

When I went back to the bank, revolving these things in my mind, I found Jones employed in arranging the correspondence. It was part of his duty to see to the preservation and filing of all letters arriving from Europe, and, strange to say, he delighted in the task. It was part of my duty to see he did his; so I sat down and began to turn over the pile of letters and messages which he had put on my desk; they dated back two years; this surprised me, and I said:

“Rather behindhand, aren't you, Jones?”

“Yes, sir, rather. Fact is, I've done 'em before, but as you've never initialled 'em, I thought I ought to bring 'em to your notice.”



## A MAN OF MARK

"Quite right—very neglectful of me. I suppose they're all right?"

"Yes, sir, all right."

"Then I won't trouble to go through them."

"They're all there, sir, except, of course, the cable about the second loan, sir."

"Except what?" I said.

"The cable about the second loan," he repeated.

I was glad to be reminded of this, for of course I wished to remove that document before the bundle finally took its place among the archives. Indeed, I thought I had done so. But why had Jones removed it? Surely Jones was not as sceptical as that?

"Ah, and where have you put that?"

"Why, sir, his Excellency took that."

"What?" I cried.

"Yes, sir. Didn't I mention it? Why, the day after you and the President were here that night, his Excellency came down in the afternoon, when you'd gone out to the Piazza, and said he wanted it. He said, sir, that you'd said it was to go to the Ministry of Finance. He was very affable, sir, and told me that it was necessary the original should be submitted to the minister for his inspection; and as he was passing by (he'd come in to cash a check on his private account) he'd take it up himself. Hasn't he given it back to you, sir? He said he would."

I had just strength enough to gasp out:

"Slipped his memory, no doubt. All right, Jones."

"May I go now, sir?" said Jones. "Mrs. Jones wanted me to go with her to——"

"Yes, go," said I, and as he went out I added a



## I APPRECIATE THE SITUATION

destination different, no doubt, from what the good lady had proposed. For I saw it all now. That old villain (pardon my warmth) had stolen my forged cable, and, if need arose, meant to produce it as his own justification. I had been done, done brown—and Jones' idiocy had made the task easy. I had no evidence but my word that the President knew the message was fabricated. Up till now I had thought that if I stood convicted I should have the honour of his Excellency's support in the dock. But now! why now, I might prove myself a thief, but I couldn't prove him one. I had convinced Jones, not for my good, but for his. I had forged papers, not for my good, but for his. True, I had spent the money myself, but——

“Damn it all!” I cried in the bitterness of my spirit, “he won about three-quarters of that.”

And his Excellency's words came back to my memory, “I make the most of my opportunities.”



## CHAPTER VI

### MOURONS POUR LA PATRIE!

THE next week was a busy one for me. I spent it in scraping together every bit of cash I could lay my hands on. If I could get together enough to pay the interest on the three hundred thousand dollars supposed to be invested in approved securities,—really disposed of in a manner only known to his Excellency,—I should have six months to look about me. Now, remaining out of my “bonus” was *nil*, out of my “reserve fund” ten thousand dollars. This was enough. But alas! how happened it that this sum was in my hands? Because I had borrowed five thousand from the bank! If they wouldn’t let their own manager overdraw, whom would they? So I overdrew. But if this money wasn’t back before the monthly balancing, Jones would know! And I dared not rely on being able to stop his mouth again. When I said Johnny Carr was the only honest man in Aureataland I forgot Jones. To my grief and annoyance Jones also was honest, and Jones would consider it his duty to let the directors know of my overdraft. If once they knew, I was lost, for an overdraft effected privately from the safe by the manager is, I do not deny it, decidedly irregular. Unless I could add five thousand dollars to my ten thousand before the end of the month I should have to bolt!

This melancholy conclusion was reinforced and



## MOURONS POUR LA PATRIE!

rendered demonstrable by a letter which arrived, to crown my woes, from my respected father, informing me that he had unhappily become indebted to our chairman in the sum of two thousand pounds, the result of a deal between them, that he had seen the chairman, that the chairman was urgent for payment, that he used most violent language against our family in general, ending by declaring his intention of stopping my salary to pay the parental debt. "If he doesn't like it he may go, and small loss." This was a most unjustifiable proceeding, but I was hardly in a position to take up a high moral attitude toward the chairman, and in the result I saw myself confronted with the certainty of beggary and the probability of jail. But for this untoward reverse of fortune I might have taken courage and made a clean breast of my misdoings, relying on the chairman's obligations to my father to pull me through. But now, where was I? I was, as Donna Antonia put it, very deep in indeed. So overwhelmed was I by my position, and so occupied with my frantic efforts to improve it, that I did not even find time to go and see the signorina, much as I needed comfort; and, as the days went on, I fell into such despair that I went nowhere, but sat dismally in my own rooms, looking at my portmanteau, and wondering how soon I must pack and fly, if not for life, at least for liberty.

At last the crash came. I was sitting in my office one morning, engaged in the difficult task of trying to make ten into fifteen, when I heard the clatter of hoofs.

A moment later the door was opened, and Jones ushered in Colonel McGregor. I nodded to the



## A MAN OF MARK

colonel, who came in with his usual leisurely step, sat himself down, and took off his gloves. I roused myself to say:

“What can I do for you, colonel?”

He waited till the door closed behind Jones, and then said:

“I’ve got to the bottom of it at last, Martin.”

This was true of myself also, but the colonel meant it in a different sense.

“Bottom of what?” I asked, rather testily.

“That old scamp’s villainy,” said he, jerking his thumb toward the Piazza and the statue of the Liberator. “He’s very ’cute, but he’s made a mistake at last.”

“Do come to the point, colonel. What’s it all about?”

“Would you be surprised to hear,” said the colonel, adopting a famous mode of speech, “that the interest on the debt would not be paid on the 31st?”

“No, I shouldn’t,” said I resignedly.

“Would you be surprised to hear that no more interest would ever be paid?”

“The devil!” I cried, leaping up. “What do you mean, man?”

“The President,” said he calmly, “will, on the 31st instant, *repudiate the national debt!*”

I had nothing left to say. I fell back in my chair and gazed at the colonel, who was now employed in lighting a cigarette. At the same moment a sound of rapid wheels struck on my ears. Then I heard the sweet, clear voice I knew so well saying:

“I’ll just disturb him for a moment, Mr. Jones. I want him to tear himself from work for a day, and come for a ride.”



## MOURONS POUR LA PATRIE!

She opened my door, and came swiftly in. On seeing the colonel she took in the position, and said to that gentleman :

“Have you told him?”

“I have just done so, signorina,” he replied.

I had not energy enough to greet her; so she also sat down uninvited, and took off her gloves—not lazily, like the colonel, but with an air as though she would, if a man, take off her coat, to meet the crisis more energetically.

At last I said, with conviction :

“He’s a wonderful man ! How did you find it out, colonel?”

“Had Johnny Carr to dine and made him drunk,” said that worthy.

“You don’t mean he trusted Johnny?”

“Odd, isn’t it?” said the colonel. “With his experience, too. He might have known Johnny was an ass. I suppose there was no one else.”

“He knew,” said the signorina, “anyone else in the place would betray him; he knew Johnny wouldn’t if he could help it. He underrated your powers, colonel.”

“Well,” said I, “I can’t help it, can I? My directors will lose. The bondholders will lose. But how does it hurt me?”

The colonel and the signorina both smiled gently.

“You do it very well, Martin,” said the former, “but it will save time if I state that both Signorina Nugent and myself are possessed of the details regarding the—” (The colonel paused, and stroked his mustache.)

“The second loan,” said the signorina.

I was less surprised at this, recollecting certain conversations.



## A MAN OF MARK

"Ah! and how did you find that out?" I asked.

"She told me," said the colonel, indicating his fair neighbour.

"And may I ask how you found it out, signorina?"

"The President told me," said that lady.

"Did you make him drunk?"

"No, not drunk," was her reply, in a very demure voice, and with downcast eyes.

We could guess how it had been done, but neither of us cared to pursue the subject. After a pause, I said:

"Well, as you both know all about it, it's no good keeping up pretences. It's very kind of you to come and warn me."

"You dear, good Mr. Martin," said the signorina, "our motives are not purely those of friendship."

"Why, how does it matter to you?"

"Simply this," said she: "the bank and its excellent manager own most of the debt. The colonel and I own the rest. If it is repudiated, the bank loses; yes, but the manager, and the colonel, and the Signorina Nugent are lost!"

"I didn't know this," I said, rather bewildered.

"Yes," said the colonel, "when the first loan was raised I lent him one hundred thousand dollars. We were thick then, and I did it in return for my rank and my seat in the Chamber. Since then I've bought up some more shares."

"You got them cheap, I suppose?" said I.

"Yes," he replied, "I averaged them at about seventy-five cents the five-dollar share."

"And what do you hold now, nominally?"

"Three hundred thousand dollars," said he shortly.



## MOURONS POUR LA PATRIE!

“I understand your interest in the matter. But you, signorina?”

The signorina appeared a little embarrassed. But at last she broke out:

“I don’t care if I do tell you. When I agreed to stay here, he [we knew whom she meant] gave me one hundred thousand dollars. And I had fifty thousand, or thereabouts, of my own that I had——”

“Saved out of your salary as a prima donna,” put in the colonel.

“What does it matter?” said she, flushing; “I had it. Well, then, what did he do? He persuaded me to put it all—the whole one hundred and fifty thousand—into his horrid debt. Oh! wasn’t it mean, Mr. Martin?”

The President had certainly combined business and pleasure in this matter.

“Disgraceful!” I remarked.

“And if that goes, I am penniless—penniless. And there’s poor aunt. What will she do?”

“Never mind your aunt,” said the colonel, rather rudely. “Well,” he went on, “you see we’re in the same boat with you, Martin.”

“Yes; and we shall soon be in the same deep water,” said I.

“Not at all!” said the colonel.

“Not at all!” echoed the signorina.

“Why, what on earth are you going to do?”

“Financial probity is the backbone of a country,” said the colonel. “Are we to stand by and see Aureataland enter on the shameful path of repudiation?”

“Never!” cried the signorina, leaping up with sparkling eyes. “Never!”



## A MAN OF MARK

She looked enchanting. But business is business; and I said again :

“What are you going to do?”

“We are going, with your help, Martin, to prevent this national disgrace. We are going—” he lowered his voice, uselessly, for the signorina struck in, in a high, merry tone, waving her gloves overhead and dancing a little *pas seul* on the floor before me, with these remarkable words :

“Hurrah for the Revolution! Hip! hip! hurrah!”

She looked like a Goddess of Freedom in her high spirits and a Paris bonnet. I lost my mental balance. Leaping up, I grasped her round the waist, and we twirled madly about the office, the signorina breaking forth into the “Marseillaise.”

“For God’s sake, be quiet!” said McGregor, in a hoarse whisper, making a clutch at me as I sped past him. “If they hear you! Stop, I tell you, Christina!”

The signorina stopped.

“Do you mean me, Colonel McGregor?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said, “and that fool Martin, too.”

“Even in times of revolution, colonel,” said I, “nothing is lost by politeness. But in substance you are right. Let us be sober.”

We sat down again, panting, the signorina between her gasps still faintly humming the psalm of liberty.

“Kindly unfold your plan, colonel,” I resumed. “I am aware that out here you think little of revolutions, but to a newcomer they appear to be matters requiring some management. You see we are only three.”

“I have the army with me,” said he grandly.



## MOURONS POUR LA PATRIE!

"In the outer office?" asked I, indulging in a sneer at the dimensions of the Aureataland forces.

"Look here, Martin," he said, scowling, "if you're coming in with us, keep your jokes to yourself."

"Don't quarrel, gentlemen," said the signorina. "It's waste of time. Tell him the plan, colonel, while I'm getting cool."

I saw the wisdom of this advice, so I said:

"Your pardon, colonel. But won't this repudiation be popular with the army? If he lets the debt slide, he can pay them."

"Exactly," said he. "Hence we must get at them before that aspect of the case strikes them. They are literally starving, and for ten dollars a man they would make Satan himself President. Have you got any money, Martin?"

"Yes," said I, "a little."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand," I replied; "I was keeping it for the interest."

"Ah! you won't want it now."

"Indeed I shall—for the second loan, you know."

"Look here, Martin; give me that ten thousand for the troops. Stand in with us, and the day I become President I'll give you back your three hundred thousand. Just look where you stand now. I don't want to be rude, but isn't it a case of——"

"Some emergency," said I thoughtfully. "Yes, it is. But where do you suppose you're going to get three hundred thousand dollars, to say nothing of your own shares?"

He drew his chair closer to mine, and, leaning forward, said:

"He's never spent the money. He's got it somewhere; much the greater part, at least."



## A MAN OF MARK

“Did Carr tell you that?”

“He didn’t know for certain; but he told me enough to make it almost certain. Besides,” he added, glancing at the signorina, “we have other reasons for suspecting it. Give me the ten thousand. You shall have your loan back, and, if you like, you shall be Minister of Finance. We practically know the money’s there; don’t we, signorina?”

She nodded assent.

“If we fail?” said I.

He drew a neat little revolver from his pocket, placed it for a moment against his ear, and re-pocketed it.

“Most lucidly explained, colonel,” said I. “Will you give me half an hour to think it over?”

“Yes,” he said. “You’ll excuse me if I stay in the outer office. Of course I trust you, Martin, but in this sort of thing——”

“All right, I see,” said I. “And you, signorina?”

“I’ll wait too,” she said.

They both rose and went out, and I heard them in conversation with Jones. I sat still, thinking hard. But scarcely a moment had passed, when I heard the door behind me open. It was the signorina. She came in, stood behind my chair, and, leaning over, put her arms round my neck.

I looked up, and saw her face full of mischief.

“What about the rose, Jack?” she asked.

I remembered. Bewildered with delight, and believing I had won her, I said:

“Your soldier till death, signorina.”

“Bother death!” said she saucily. “Nobody’s going to die. We shall win, and then——”

“And then,” said I eagerly, “you’ll marry me, sweet?”



## MOURONS POUR LA PATRIE!

She quietly stooped down and kissed my lips. Then, stroking my hair, she said :

“ You’re a nice boy, but you’re not a good boy, Jack.”

“ Christina, you won’t marry him ? ”

“ Him ? ”

“ McGregor,” said I.

“ Jack,” said she, whispering now, “ I hate him ! ”

“ So do I,” I answered promptly. “ And if it’s to win you, I’ll upset a dozen Presidents.”

“ Then you’ll do it for me ? I like to think you’ll do it for me, and not for the money.”

As the signorina was undoubtedly “ doing it ” for her money, this was a shade unreasonable.

“ I don’t mind the money coming in—” I began.

“ Mercenary wretch ! ” she cried. “ I didn’t kiss you, did I ? ”

“ No,” I replied. “ You said you would in a minute, when I consented.”

“ Very neat, Jack,” she said. But she went and opened the door and called to McGregor, “ Mr. Martin sees no objection to the arrangement, and he will come to dinner to-night, as you suggest, and talk over the details. We’re all going to make our fortunes, Mr. Jones,” she went on, without waiting for any acceptance of her implied invitation, “ and when we’ve made ours, we’ll think about you and Mrs. Jones.”

I heard Jones making some noise, incoherently suggestive of gratification, for he was as bad as any of us about the signorina, and then I was left to my reflections. These were less sombre than the reader would, perhaps, anticipate. True, I was putting my head into a noose ; and if the President’s hands ever found their way to the end of the rope, I fan-



## A MAN OF MARK

cied he would pull it pretty tight. But, again, I was immensely in love, and equally in debt ; and the scheme seemed to open the best chance of satisfying my love, and the only chance of filling my pocket. To a young man life without love isn't worth much ; to a man of any age, in my opinion, life without money isn't worth much ; it becomes worth still less when he is held to account for money he ought to have. So I cheerfully entered upon my biggest gamble, holding the stake of life well risked. My pleasure in the affair was only marred by the enforced partnership of McGregor. There was no help for this, but I knew he wasn't much fonder of me than I of him, and I found myself gently meditating on the friction likely to arise between the new President and his minister of finance, in case our plans succeeded. Still the signorina hated him, and by all signs she loved me. So I lay back in my chair, and recalled my charmer's presence by whistling the hymn of liberty until it was time to go to lunch, an observance not to be omitted even by conspirators.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE MINE IS LAID

THE morning meeting had been devoted to principles and to the awakening of enthusiasm ; in the evening the conspirators condescended upon details, and we held a prolonged and anxious conference at the signorina's. Mrs. Carrington was commanded to have a headache after dinner, and retired with it to bed ; and from ten till one we sat and conspired. The result of our deliberations was a very pretty plan, of which the main outlines were as follows :

This was Tuesday. On Friday night the colonel, with twenty determined ruffians (or resolute patriots) previously bound to him, body and soul, by a donation of no less than fifty dollars a man, was to surprise the Golden House, seize the person of the President and all cash and securities on the premises ; no killing, if it could be avoided, but on the other hand no shilly-shally. McGregor wanted to put the President out of the way at once, as a precautionary measure, but I strongly opposed this proposal, and, finding the signorina was absolutely inflexible on the same side, he yielded. I had a strong desire to be present at this midnight surprise, but another duty called for my presence. There was a gala supper at the barracks that evening, to commemorate some incident or other in the national history, and I was to be present and to reply to the toast of "The Commerce of Aureataland." My task was, *at all hazards*, to keep this



## A MAN OF MARK

party going till the colonel's job was done, when he would appear at the soldiers' quarters, bribe in hand, and demand their allegiance. Our knowledge of the character of the troops made us regard the result as a certainty, if once the President was a prisoner and the dollars before their eyes. The colonel and the troops were to surround the officers' mess-room, and offer them life and largesse, or death and destruction. Here again we anticipated their choice with composure. The army was then to be paraded in the Piazza, the town overawed or converted, and, behold, the Revolution was accomplished! The success of this design entirely depended on its existence remaining a dead secret from the one man we feared, and on that one man being found alone and unguarded at twelve o'clock on Friday night. If he discovered the plot, we were lost. If he took it into his head to attend the supper, our difficulties would be greatly increased. At this point we turned to the signorina, and I said briefly :

"This appears to be where you come in, signorina. Permit me to invite you to dine with his Excellency on Friday evening at eight precisely."

"You mean," she said slowly, "that I am to keep him at home, and, but for myself, alone, on Friday?"

"Yes," said I. "Is there any difficulty?"

"I do not think there is great difficulty," she said, "but I don't like it; it looks so treacherous."

Of course it did. I didn't like her doing it myself, but how else was the President to be secured?

"Rather late to think of that, isn't it?" asked McGregor, with a sneer. "A revolution won't run on high moral wheels."



## THE MINE IS LAID

"Think how he jockeyed you about the money," said I, assuming the part of the tempter.

"By the way," said McGregor, "it's understood the signorina enters into possession of the President's country villa, isn't it?"

Now, my poor signorina had a longing for that choice little retreat; and between resentment for her lost money and a desire for the pretty house on the one hand, and, on the other, her dislike of the Delilah-like part she was to play, she was sore beset. Left to herself, I believe she would have yielded to her better feelings, and spoiled the plot. As it was, the colonel and I, alarmed at this recrudescence of conscience, managed to stifle its promptings, and bent her to our wicked will.

"After all, he deserves it," she said, "and I'll do it!"

It is always sad to see anybody suffering from a loss of self-respect, so I tried to restore the signorina's confidence in her own motives, by references to Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, Charlotte Corday, and such other relentless heroines as occurred to me. McGregor looked upon this striving after self-justification with undisguised contempt.

"It's only making a fool of him again," he said; "you've done it before, you know!"

"I'll do it, if you'll swear not to—to hurt him," she said.

"I've promised already," he replied sullenly. "I won't touch him, unless he brings it on himself. If he tries to kill me, I suppose I needn't bare my breast to the blow?"

"No, no," I interposed; "I have a regard for his Excellency, but we must not let our feelings betray us into weakness. He must be taken—alive



## A MAN OF MARK

and well, if possible—but in the last resort, dead or alive.”

“Come, that’s more like sense,” said the colonel approvingly.

The signorina sighed, but opposed us no longer.

Returning to ways and means, we arranged for communication in case of need during the next three days without the necessity of meeting. My position, as the centre of financial business in Whittingham, made this easy; the passage of bank messengers to and fro would excite little remark, and the messages could easily be so expressed as to reveal nothing to an uninstructed eye. It was further agreed that on the smallest hint of danger reaching any one of us, the word should at once be passed to the others, and we should *rendez-vous* at the colonel’s “ranch,” which lay some seven miles from the town. Thence, in this lamentable case, escape would be more possible.

“And now,” said the colonel, “if Martin will hand over the dollars, I think that’s about all.”

I had brought the ten thousand dollars with me. I produced them and put them on the table, keeping a loving hand on them.

“You fully understand my position, colonel?” I said. “This thing is no use to me unless I receive at least three hundred and twenty thousand dollars, to pay back principal, to meet interest, and to replace another small debt to the bank. If I do that, I shall be left with a net profit of five thousand dollars, not an extravagant reward. If I don’t get that sum I shall be a defaulter, revolution or no revolution.”

“I can’t make money if it’s not there,” he said, but without his usual brusqueness of tone. “But



## THE MINE IS LAID

to this we agree: You are to have first turn at anything we find, up to the sum you name. It's to be handed over solid to you. The signorina and I take the leavings. You don't claim to share them too, do you?"

"No," I said, "I'm content to be a preference shareholder. If the money's found at the Golden House, it's mine. If not, the new Government, whatever it may do as to the rest of the debt, will pay me that sum."

With that I pushed my money over to the colonel.

"I expect the new Government to be very considerate to the bondholders all round," said the colonel, as he pocketed it with a chuckle. "Anyhow, your terms are agreed; eh, signorina?"

"Agreed!" said she. "And I'm to have the country seat?"

"Agreed!" said I. "And the colonel's to be President and to have the Golden House and all that therein is."

"Agreed! agreed! agreed!" chanted the signorina; "and that's quite enough business, and it's very late for me to be entertaining gentlemen. One toast, and then good-night. Success to the Revolution! To be drunk in blood-red wine!"

As there was no red wine, except claret, and that lies cold on the stomach at three in the morning, we drank it in French brandy. I had risen to go, when a sudden thought struck me:

"By Jupiter! where's Johnny Carr? I say, colonel, how drunk was he last night? Do you think he remembers telling you about it?"

"Yes," said the colonel, "I expect he does by now. He didn't when I left him this morning."



## A MAN OF MARK

"Will he confess to the President? If he does, it might make the old man keep an unpleasantly sharp eye on you. He knows you don't love him."

"Well, he hasn't seen the President yet. He was to stay at my house over to-day. He was uncommon seedy this morning, and I persuaded the doctor to give him a composing draught. Fact is, I wanted him quiet till I'd had time to think! You know I don't believe he would own up—the President would drop on him so; but he might, and it's better they shouldn't meet."

"There's somebody else he oughtn't to meet," said the signorina.

"Who's that?" I asked.

"Donna Antonia," she replied. "He's getting very fond of her, and depend upon it, if he's in trouble he'll go and tell her the first thing. Mr. Carr is very confidential to his friends."

We recognised the value of this suggestion. If Donna Antonia knew, the President would soon know.

"Quite right," said the colonel. "It won't do to have them rushing about letting out that we know all about it. He's all right up to now."

"Yes, but if he gets restive to-morrow morning?" said I. "And then you don't want him at the Golden House on Friday evening, and I don't want him at the barracks."

"No, he'd show fight, Carr would," said the colonel. "Look here, we're in for this thing, and I'm going through with it. I shall keep Carr at my house till it's all over."

"How?" asked the signorina.

"By love, if possible!" said the colonel, with a grin—"that is, by drink. Failing that, by force."



## THE MINE IS LAID

It's essential that the old man shouldn't get wind of anything being up; and if Carr told him about last night he'd prick up his wicked old ears. No, Master Johnny is better quiet."

"Suppose he turns nasty," I suggested again.

"He may turn as nasty as he likes," said the colonel. "He don't leave my house unless he puts a bullet into me first. That's settled. Leave it to me. If he behaves nicely, he'll be all right. If not——"

"What shall you do to him?" asked the signorina.

I foresaw another outburst of conscience, and though I liked Johnny, I liked myself better. So I said:

"Oh, leave it to the colonel; he'll manage all right."

"Now I'm off," said the latter, "back to my friend Johnny. Good-night, signorina. Write to the President to-morrow. Good-night, Martin. Make that speech of yours pretty long. *Au revoir* till next Friday."

I prepared to go, for the colonel lingered till I came with him. Even then we so distrusted one another that neither would leave the other alone with the signorina.

We parted at the door, he going off up the road to get his horse and ride to his "ranch," I turning down toward the Piazza.

We left the signorina at the door, looking pale and weary, and for once bereft of her high spirits. Poor girl! She found conspiracy rather trying work.

I was a little troubled myself. I began to see more clearly that it doesn't do for a man of scruples



## A MAN OF MARK

to dabble in politics. I had a great regard for poor Johnny, and I felt no confidence in the colonel treating him with any consideration. In fact, I would not have insured Johnny's life for the next week at any conceivable premium. Again I thought it unlikely that, if we succeeded, the President would survive his downfall. I had to repeat to myself all the story of his treachery to me, lashing myself into a fury against him, before I could bring myself to think with resignation of the imminent extinction of that shining light. What a loss he would be to the world! So many delightful stories, so great a gift of manner, so immense a personal charm—all to disappear into the pit! And for what? To put into his place a ruffian without redeeming qualities. Was it worth while to put down Lucifer only to enthrone Beelzebub? I could only check this doleful strain of reflection by sternly recalling myself to the real question—the state of the fortunes of me, John Martin. And to me the revolution was necessary. I might get the money; at least I should gain time. And I might satisfy my love. I was animated by the honourable motive of saving my employers from loss and by the overwhelming motive of my own passion. If the continued existence of Johnny and the President was incompatible with these legitimate objects, so much the worse for Johnny and the President.



## CHAPTER VIII

### JOHNNY CARR IS WILFUL

THE next three days were on the whole the most uncomfortable I have ever spent in my life. I got little sleep and no rest; I went about with a revolver handy all day, and jumped every time I heard a sound. I expended much change in buying every edition of all the papers; I listened with dread to the distant cries of news-venders, fearing, as the words gradually became distinguishable, to hear that our secret was a secret no longer. I was bound to show myself, and yet shrank from all gatherings of men. I transacted my business with an absent mind and a face of such superhuman innocence that, had anyone been watching me, he must at once have suspected something wrong. I was incapable of adding up a row of figures, and Jones became most solicitous about the state of my brain. In a word, my nerves were quite shattered, and I registered a vow never to upset a Government again as long as I lived. In future, the established constitution would have to be good enough for me. I invoked impartial curses on the President, the colonel, the directors, and myself! and I verily believe that only the thought of the signorina prevented me making a moonlight flitting across the frontier with a whole skin at least, if with an empty pocket, and leaving the rival patriots of Aureataland to fight it out among themselves.

Happily, however, nothing occurred to justify



## A MAN OF MARK

my fears. The other side seemed to be sunk in dull security. The President went often to the Ministry of Finance, and was closeted for hours with Don Antonio ; I suppose they were perfecting their nefarious scheme. There were no signs of excitement or activity at the barracks ; the afternoon gatherings on the Piazza were occupied with nothing more serious than the prospects of lawn tennis and the grievous dearth of dances. The official announcements relative to the debt had had a quieting effect ; and all classes seemed inclined to wait and see what the President's new plan was.

So passed Wednesday and Thursday. On neither day had I heard anything from my fellow-conspirators ; our arrangements for writing had so far proved unnecessary—or unsuccessful. The latter possibility sent a shiver down my back, and my lively fancy pictured his Excellency's smile as he perused the treasonable documents. If I heard nothing on the morning of Friday, I was determined at all risks to see the colonel. With the dawn of that eventful day, however, I was relieved of this necessity. I was lying in bed about half-past nine (for I never add to the woes of life by early rising) when my servant brought in three letters.

“ Sent on from the bank, sir,” he said, “ with Mr. Jones' compliments, and are you going there this morning ? ”

“ My compliments to Mr. Jones, and he may expect me in five minutes,” I replied.

The letters were all marked “ Immediate ” ; one from the signorina, one from the colonel, one from the barracks. I opened the last first and read as follows :



## JOHNNY CARR IS WILFUL

“The officers of the Aureataland Army have the honour to remind Mr. John Martin that they hope to have the pleasure of his company at supper this evening at ten o'clock precisely. In the unavoidable absence of his Excellency, the President, owing to the pressing cares of state, and of the Hon. Colonel McGregor from indisposition, the toast of the Army of Aureataland will be proposed by Major Alphonse DeChair.

“P. S.—Cher Martin, speak long this night. The two great men do not come, and the evening wants to be filled out. *Tout à vous,*

“ALPHONSE DECHAIR.”

“It shall be long, my dear boy, and we will fill out your evening for you,” said I to myself, well pleased so far.

Then I opened the signorina's epistle.

“DEAR MR. MARTIN [it began]: Will you be so kind as to send me in the course of the day *twenty dollars in small change?* I want to give the school children a scramble. I inclose check. I am so sorry you could not dine with me to-night, but after all I am glad, because I should have had to put you off, for I am commanded rather sudden to dine at the Golden House. With kind regards, believe me, yours sincerely,

“CHRISTINA NUGENT.”

“Very good,” said I. “I reckon the scramble will keep. And now for the colonel.”

The colonel's letter ran thus:

“DEAR MARTIN: I inclose check for five hundred dollars. My man will call for the cash to-morrow morning. I give you notice because I



## A MAN OF MARK

want it all in silver for wages. [Rather a poverty of invention among us, I thought.] Carr and I are here together, both seedy. Poor Carr is on his back and likely to remain there for a day or two—bad attack of champagne. I'm better, and though I've cut the affair at barracks to-night, I fully expect to be up and about this afternoon.

“Ever yours,

“GEO. MCGREGOR.”

“Oh! so Carr is on his back and likely to remain there, is he? Very likely, I expect; but I wonder what it means. I hope the colonel hasn't been very drastic. However, everything seems right; in fact, better than I hoped.”

In this more cheerful frame of mind I arose, breakfasted at leisure, and set out for the bank about eleven.

Of course, the first person I met in the street was one of the last I wanted to meet, namely, Donna Antonia. She was on horseback, and her horse looked as if he'd done some work. At the sight of me she reined up, and I could not avoid stopping as I lifted my hat.

“Whence so early?” I asked.

“Early?” she said. “I don't call this early. I've been for a long ride; in fact, I've ridden over to Mr. Carr's place, with a message from papa; but he's not there. Do you know where he is, Mr. Martin?”

“Haven't an idea,” said I.

“He hasn't been home for four nights,” she continued, “and he hasn't been to the Ministry either. It's very odd that he should disappear like this, just when all the business is going on, too.”



## JOHNNY CARR IS WILFUL

“What business, Donna Antonia?” I asked blandly.

She coloured, recollecting, no doubt, that the business was still a secret.

“Oh, well! you know they’re always busy at the Ministry of Finance at this time. It’s the time they pay everybody, isn’t it?”

“It’s the time they ought to pay everybody,” I said.

“Well,” she went on, without noticing my correction, “at any rate, papa and the President are both very much vexed with him; so I offered to make my ride in his direction.”

“Where can he be?” I asked again.

“Well,” she replied, “I believe he’s at Colonel McGregor’s, and after lunch I shall go over there. I know he dined there on Monday, and I dare say he stayed on.”

“No,” thought I, “you mustn’t do that, it might be inconvenient.” So I said :

“I know he’s not there; I heard from McGregor this morning, and he says Carr left him on Tuesday. Why, how stupid I am! The colonel says Carr told him he was going off for a couple of days’ sail in his yacht. I expect he’s got contrary winds, and can’t get back again.”

“It’s very bad of him to go,” she said, “but no doubt that’s it. Papa will be angry, but he’ll be glad to know no harm has come to him.”

“Happy to have relieved your mind,” said I, and bade her farewell, thanking my stars for a lucky inspiration, and wondering whether Don Antonio would find no harm had come to poor Johnny. I had my doubts. I regretted having to tell Donna Antonia what I did not believe to be



## A MAN OF MARK

true, but these things are incidental to revolutions—a point of resemblance between them and commercial life.

When I arrived at the bank I despatched brief answers to my budget of letters; each of the answers was to the same purport, namely, that I should be at the barracks at the appointed time. I need not trouble the reader with the various wrappings in which this essential piece of intelligence was involved. I then had a desperate encounter with Jones; business was slack, and Jones was fired with the unholy desire of seizing the opportunity thus offered to make an exhaustive inquiry into the state of our reserve. He could not understand my sudden punctiliousness as to times and seasons, and I was afraid I should have to tell him plainly that only over my lifeless body should he succeed in investing the contents of the safe. At last I effected a diversion by persuading him to give Mrs. Jones a jaunt into the country, and, thus left in peace, I spent my afternoon in making final preparations. I burned many letters; I wrote a touching farewell to my father, in which, under the guise of offering forgiveness, I took occasion to point out to him how greatly his imprudent conduct had contributed to increase the difficulties of his dutiful son. I was only restrained from making a will by the obvious imprudence of getting it witnessed. I spent a feverish hour in firing imaginary shots from my revolver, to ascertain whether the instrument was in working order. Finally I shut up the bank at five, went to the Piazza, partook of a light repast, and smoked cigars with mad speed till it was time to dress for the supper; and never was I more rejoiced than when the moment



## JOHNNY CARR IS WILFUL

for action at last came. As I was dressing, lingering over each garment with a feeling that I might never put it on, or, for that matter, take it off again, I received a second note from the colonel. It was brought by a messenger, on a sweating horse, who galloped up to my door. I knew the messenger well by sight; he was the colonel's valet. My heart was in my mouth as I took the envelope from his hands (for I ran down myself). The fellow was evidently in our secret, for he grinned nervously at me as he handed it over, and said:

"I was to ride fast, and destroy the letter if anyone came near."

I nodded, and opened it. It said:

"C. escaped about six this evening. Believed to have gone to his house. He *suspects*. If you see him, shoot on sight."

I turned to the man.

"Had Mr. Carr a horse?" I asked.

"No, sir; left on foot."

"But there are horses at his house."

"No, sir, the colonel has borrowed them all."

"Why do you think he's gone there?"

"Couldn't come along the road to Whittingham, sir, it's patrolled."

There was still a chance. It was ten miles across the country from the colonel's to Johnny's and six miles on from Johnny's to Whittingham. The man divined my thoughts.

"He can't go fast, sir, he's wounded in the leg. If he goes home first, as he will, because he doesn't know his horses are gone, he can't get here before eleven at the earliest."



## A MAN OF MARK

"How was he wounded?" I asked. "Tell me what the colonel did to him, and be short."

"Yes, sir. The colonel told us Mr. Carr was to be kept at the ranch over night; wasn't to leave it alive, sir, he said. Well, up to yesterday it was all right and pleasant. Mr. Carr wasn't very well, and the doses the colonel gave him didn't seem to make him any better—quite the contrary. But yesterday afternoon he got rampageous, would go, anyhow, ill or well! So he got up and dressed. We'd taken all his weapons from him, sir, and when he came down dressed, and asked for his horse, we told him he couldn't go. Well, he just said, 'Get out of the light, I tell you,' and began walking toward the hall door. I don't mind saying we were rather put about, sir. We didn't care to shoot him as he stood, and it's my belief we'd have let him pass; but just as he was going out, in comes the colonel. 'Hallo! what's this, Johnny?' says he. 'You've got some damned scheme on,' said Mr. Carr. 'I believe you've been drugging me. Out of the way, McGregor, or I'll brain you.' 'Where are you going?' says the colonel. 'To Whittingham, to the President's' said he. 'Not to-day,' says the colonel. 'Come, be reasonable, Johnny. You'll be all right to-morrow.' 'Colonel McGregor,' says he, 'I'm unarmed, and you've got a revolver. You can shoot me if you like, but unless you do, I'm going out. You've been playing some dodge on me, and, by God! you shall pay for it.' With that he rushed straight at the colonel. The colonel, he stepped on one side and let him pass. Then he went after him to the door, waited till he was about fifteen yards off, then up with his revolver, as cool as you like, and



## JOHNNY CARR IS WILFUL

shot him as clean as a sixpence in the right leg. Down came Mr. Carr; he lay there a minute or two cursing, and then he fainted. 'Pick him up, dress his wound, and put him to bed,' says the colonel. Well, sir, it was only a flesh wound, so we soon got him comfortable, and there he lay all night."

"How did he get away to-day?"

"We were all out, sir—went over to Mr. Carr's place to borrow his horses. The colonel took a message, sir. [Here the fellow grinned again.] I don't know what it was. Well, when we'd got the horses, we rode round outside the town, and came into the road between here and the colonel's. Ten horses we got, and we went there to give the ten men who were patrolling the road the fresh horses. We heard from them that no one had come along. When we got home, he'd been gone two hours!"

"How did he manage it?"

"A woman, sir," said my warrior, with supreme disgust. "Gave her a kiss and ten dollars to undo the front door, and then he was off! He daren't go to the stables to get a horse, so he was forced to limp away on his game leg. A plucky one he is, too," he concluded.

"Poor old Johnny!" said I. "You didn't go after him?"

"No time, sir. Couldn't tire the horses. Besides, when he'd once got home, he's got a dozen men there, and they'd have kept us all night. Well, sir, I must be off. Any answer for the colonel? He'll be outside the Golden House by eleven, sir, and Mr. Carr won't get in if he comes after that."



## A MAN OF MARK

“Tell him to rely on me,” I answered. But for all that I didn’t mean to shoot Johnny on sight. So, much perturbed in spirit, I set off to the barracks, wondering when Johnny would get to Whittingham, and whether he would fall into the colonel’s hands outside the Golden House. It struck me as unpleasantly probable that he might come and spoil the harmony of my evening; if he came there first, the conspiracy would probably lose my aid at an early moment! What would happen to me I didn’t know. But, as I took off my coat in the lobby, I bent down as if to tie a shoestring, and had one more look at my revolver.



## CHAPTER IX

### A SUPPER PARTY

I SHALL never forget that supper as long as I live. Considered merely as a social gathering it would be memorable enough, for I never before or since sat at meat with ten such queer customers as my hosts of that evening. The officers of the Aureataland Army were a very mixed lot—two or three Spanish-Americans, three or four Brazilians, and the balance Americans of the type their countrymen are least proud of. If there was an honest man among them he sedulously concealed his title to distinction; I know there wasn't a sober one. The amount of liquor consumed was portentous; and I gloated with an unholy joy as I saw man after man rapidly making himself what diplomatists call a *quantité négligéable*. The conversation needed all the excuse the occasion could afford, and the wit would have appeared unduly coarse in a common pot-house. All this might have passed from my memory, or blended in a subdued harmony with my general impression of Aureataland; but the peculiar position in which I stood gave to my mind an unusual activity of perception. Among this band of careless, drunken revellers I sat vigilant, restless, and impatient; feigning to take a leading part in their dissolute hilarity, I was sober, collected, and alert to my very finger-tips. I anxiously watched their bearing and expression. I led them on to speak of the President, rejoicing



## A MAN OF MARK

when I elicited open murmurs and covert threats at his base ingratitude to the men on whose support his power rested. They had not been paid for six months, and were ripe for any mischief. I was more than once tempted to forestall the colonel and begin the revolution on my own account; only my inability to produce before their eyes any arguments of the sort they would listen to restrained me.

Eleven o'clock had come and gone. The senior captain had proposed the President's health. It was drunk in sullen silence; I was the only man who honoured it by rising from his seat.

The major had proposed the army, and they had drunk deep to their noble selves. A young man of weak expression and quavering legs had proposed "The commerce of Aureataland," coupled with the name of Mr. John Martin, in laudatory but incoherent terms, and I was on my legs replying. Oh, that speech of mine! For discursiveness, for repetition, for sheer inanity, I suppose it has never been equalled. I droned steadily away, interrupted only by cries for fresh supplies of wine; as I went on the audience paid less and less attention. It was past twelve. The well of my eloquence was running drier and drier, and yet no sound outside! I wondered how long they would stand it and how long I could stand it. At 12.15 I began my peroration. Hardly had I done so, when one of the young men started in a gentle voice an utterly indescribable ditty. One by one they took it up, till the rising tide of voices drowned my fervent periods. Perforce I stopped. They were all on their feet now. Did they mean to break up? In despair at the idea I lifted up



## A SUPPER PARTY

my voice, loud and distinct (the only distinct voice left in the room), in the most shameful verse of that shameful composition, and seizing my neighbour's hand began to move slowly round the table. The move was successful. Each man followed suit, and the whole party, kicking back their chairs, revolved with lurching steps round the *débris* of empty bottles and cigar ashes.

The room was thick with smoke, and redolent of fumes of wine. Mechanically I led the chorus, straining every nerve to hear a sound from outside. I was growing dizzy with the movement, and, overwrought with the strain on my nerves. I knew a few minutes more would be the limit of endurance, when at last I heard a loud shout and tumult of voices.

"What's that?" exclaimed the major, in thick tones, pausing as he spoke.

I dropped his hand, and, seizing my revolver, said:

"Some drunken row in barracks, major. Let 'em alone."

"I must go," he said. "Character—Aureata-land—army—at stake."

"Set a thief to catch a thief, eh, major?" said I.

"What do you mean, sir?" he stuttered. "Let me go."

"If you move, I shoot, major," said I, bring out my weapon.

I never saw greater astonishment on human countenance. He swore loudly, and then cried:

"Hi, stop him—he's mad—he's going to shoot!"

A shout of laughter rose from the crew around us, for they felt exquisite appreciation of my supposed joke.

"Right you are, Martin!" cried one. "Keep him quiet. We won't go home till morning."



## A MAN OF MARK

The major turned to the window. It was a moonlight night, and as I looked with him I saw the courtyard full of soldiers. Who was in command? The answer to that meant much to me.

This sight somewhat sobered the major.

"A mutiny!" he cried. "The soldiers have risen!"

"Go to bed," said the junior ensign.

"Look out of window!" he cried.

They all staggered to the window. As the soldiers saw them, they raised a shout. I could not distinguish whether it was a greeting or a threat. They took it as the latter, and turned to the door.

"Stop!" I cried; "I shoot the first man who opens the door."

In wonder they turned on me. I stood facing them, revolver in hand. They waited huddled together for an instant, then made a rush at me; I fired, but missed. I had a vision of a poised decanter; a second later, the missile caught me in the chest and hurled me back against the wall. As I fell I dropped my weapon, and they were upon me. I thought it was all over; but as they surged round, in the madness of drink and anger, I, looking through their ranks, saw the door open and a crowd of men rush in. Who was at their head? Thank God! it was the colonel, and his voice rose high above the tumult:

"Order, gentlemen, order!" Then to his men he added:

"Each mark your man, and two of you bring Mr. Martin here."

I was saved. To explain how, I must tell you what had been happening at the Golden House, and how the night attack had fared.



## CHAPTER X

### TWO SURPRISES

IT is a sad necessity that compels us to pry into the weaknesses of our fellow-creatures, and seek to turn them to our own profit. I am not philosopher enough to say whether this course of conduct derives any justification from its universality, but in the region of practice, I have never hesitated to place myself on a moral level with those with whom I had to deal. I may occasionally even have left the other party to make this needful adjustment, and I have never known him fail to do so. I felt, therefore, very little scruple in making use of the one weak spot discoverable in the defences of our redoubtable opponent, his Excellency the President of Aureataland. No doubt the reader's eye has before now detected the joint in that great man's armour at which we directed our missile. As a lover, I grudged the employment of the signorina in this service; as a politician, I was proud of the device; as a human being, I recognised, what we are very ready to recognise, that it did not become me to refuse to work with such instruments as appeared to be put into my hands.

But whatever may be the verdict of moralists on our device, events proved its wisdom. The President had no cause to suspect a trap; therefore, like a sensible man, he chose to spend the evening with the signorina rather than with his gallant officers.



## A MAN OF MARK

With equally good taste, he elected to spend it *tête-à-tête* with her, when she gave him the opportunity. In our subsequent conversations, the signorina was not communicative as to how the early hours of the evening passed. She preferred to begin her narrative from the point when their solitude was interrupted. As I rely on her account and that of the colonel for this part of my story, I am compelled to make my start from the same moment. It appears that at a few minutes past eleven o'clock, when the President was peacefully smoking a cigar and listening to the conversation of his fair guest (whom he had galvanised into an affected liveliness by alarming remarks on her apparent preoccupation), there fell upon his ear the sound of a loud knocking at the door. Dinner had been served in a small room at the back of the house, and the President could not command a view of the knocker without going out on to the veranda, which ran all round the house, and walking round to the front. When the knock was heard, the signorina started up.

"Don't disturb yourself, pray," said his Excellency, politely. "I gave special instructions that I was visible to no one this evening. But I was wondering whether it could be Johnny Carr. I want to speak to him for a moment, and I'll just go round outside and see if it is."

As he spoke, a discreet tap was heard at the door.

"Yes?" said the President.

"Mr. Carr is at the door and particularly wants to see your Excellency. An urgent matter, he says."

"Tell him I'll come round and speak to him from the veranda," replied the President.



## TWO SURPRISES

He turned to the window, and threw it open to step out.

Let me tell what followed in the signorina's words.

"Just then we heard a sound of a number of horses galloping up. The President stopped and said:

" 'Hallo! what's up?'

"Then there was a shout and a volley of shots, and I heard the colonel's voice cry:

" 'Down with your arms; down, I say, or you're dead men.'

"The President stepped quickly across the room to his *escritoire*, took up his revolver, went back to the window, passed through it, and without a word disappeared. I could not hear even the sound of his foot on the veranda.

"I heard one more shot—then a rush of men to the door, and the colonel burst in, with sword and revolver in his hands, and followed by ten or a dozen men.

"I ran to him, terrified, and cried:

" 'Oh, is anyone hurt?'

"He took no notice, but asked hastily:

" 'Where is he?'

"I pointed to the veranda, and gasped:

" 'He went out there.' Then I turned to one of the men and said again:

" 'Is anyone hurt?'

" 'Only Mr. Carr,' he replied. 'The rest of 'em were a precious sight too careful of themselves.'

" 'And is he killed?'

" 'Don't think he's dead, miss,' he said; 'but he's hurt badly.'

"As I turned again, I saw the President stand-



## A MAN OF MARK

ing quite calmly in the window. When the colonel saw him he raised his revolver and said:

“‘Do you yield, General Whittingham? We are twelve to one.’

“As he spoke, every man covered the President with his aim. The latter stood facing the twelve revolvers, his own weapon hanging loosely in his left hand. Then, smiling, he said a little bitterly:

“‘Heroics are not in my line, McGregor. I suppose this is a popular rising—that is to say, you have bribed my men, murdered my best friend, and beguiled me with the lures of that——’

“I could not bear the words that hung on his lips, and with a sob I fell on a sofa and hid my face.

“‘Well, we mustn’t use hard names,’ he went on, in a gentler tone. ‘We are all as God made us. I give in,’ and, throwing down his weapon, he asked, ‘Have you quite killed Carr?’

“‘I don’t know,’ said the colonel, implying plainly that he did not care either.

“‘I suppose it was you that shot him?’

“The colonel nodded.

“The President yawned, and looked at his watch.

“‘As I have no part in to-night’s performance,’ said he, ‘I presume I am at liberty to go to bed?’

“The colonel said shortly:

“‘Where’s the bedroom?’

“‘In there,’ said the President, waving his hand to a door facing that by which the colonel had entered.

“‘Permit me,’ said the latter. He went in, no doubt to see if there were any other egress. Returning shortly he said:

“‘My men must stay here, and you must leave the door open.’



## TWO SURPRISES

“ ‘I have no objection,’ said the President. ‘No doubt they will respect my modesty.’

“ ‘Two of you stay in this room. Two of you keep watch in the veranda, one at this window, the other at the bedroom window. I shall put three more sentries outside. General Whittingham is not to leave this room. If you hear or see anything going on in there, go in and put him under restraint. Otherwise treat him with respect.’

“ ‘I thank you for your civility,’ said the President, ‘also for the compliment implied in these precautions. Is it over this matter of the debt that your patriotism has drawn you into revolt?’

“ ‘I see no use in discussing public affairs at this moment,’ the colonel replied. ‘And my presence is required elsewhere. I regret that I cannot relieve you of the presence of these men, but I do not feel I should be justified in accepting your *parole*.’

“The President did not seem to be angered at this insult.

“ ‘I have not offered it,’ he said simply. ‘It is better you should take your own measures. Need I detain you, colonel?’

“The colonel did not answer him, but turned to me and said:

“ ‘Signorina Nugent, we wait only for you, and time is precious.’

“ ‘I will follow you in a moment,’ I said, with my head still among the cushions.

“ ‘No, come now,’ he commanded.

“Looking up, I saw a smile on the President’s face. As I rose reluctantly, he also got up from the chair into which he had flung himself, and stopped me with a gesture. I was terribly afraid



## A MAN OF MARK

that he was going to say something hard to me, but his voice only expressed a sort of amused pity.

“‘The money, was it, signorina?’ he said. ‘Young people and beautiful people should not be mercenary. Poor child! you had better have stood by me.’

“I answered him nothing, but went out with the colonel, leaving him seated again in his chair, surveying with some apparent amusement the two threatening sentries who stood at the door. The colonel hurried me out of the house, saying:

“‘We must ride to the barracks. If the news gets there before us, they may cut up rough. You go home. Your work is done.’

“So they mounted and rode away, leaving me in the road. There were no signs of any struggle, except the door hanging loose on its hinges, and a drop or two of blood on the steps where they had shot poor Johnny Carr. I went straight home, and what happened in the next few hours at the Golden House I don’t know, and, knowing how I left the President, I cannot explain. I went home, and cried till I thought my heart would break.”

Thus far the signorina. I must beg to call special attention to the closing lines of her narrative. But before I relate the very startling occurrence to which she refers, we must return to the barracks, where, it will be remembered, matters were in a rather critical condition. When the officers saw their messroom suddenly filled with armed men, and heard the alarming order issued by the colonel, their attention was effectually diverted from me. They crowded together on one side of the table, facing the colonel and his men on the other. Assisted by the two men sent to my aid, I



## TWO SURPRISES

seized the opportunity to push my way through them and range myself by the side of my leader. After a moment's pause the colonel began :

“The last thing we should desire, gentlemen,” he said, “is to resort to force. But the time for explanation is short. The people of Aureataland have at last risen against the tyranny they have so long endured. General Whittingham has proved a traitor to the cause of freedom; he won his position in the name of liberty; he has used it to destroy liberty. The voice of the people has declared him to have forfeited his high office. The people have placed in my hand the sword of vengeance. Armed with this mighty sanction, I have appealed to the army. The army has proved true to its traditions—true to its character of the protector, not the oppressor, of the people. Gentlemen, will you who lead the army take your proper place?”

There was no reply to this moving appeal. He advanced closer to them, and went on :

“There is no middle way. You are patriots or traitors—friends of liberty or friends of tyranny. I stand here to offer you either a traitor's death, or, if you will, life, honour, and the satisfaction of all your just claims. Do you mistrust the people? I, as their representative, here offer you every just due the people owes you—debts which had long been paid but for the greed of that great traitor.”

As he said this he took from his men some bags of money, and threw them on the table with a loud chink.

Major DeChair glanced at the bags, and glanced at his comrades, and said :

“In the cause of liberty God forbid we should be behind. Down with the tyrant!”



## A MAN OF MARK

And all the pack yelped in chorus!

"Then, gentlemen, to the head of your men," said the colonel, and going to the window, he cried to the throng:

"Men, your noble officers are with us."

A cheer answered him. I wiped my forehead, and said to myself, "That's well over."

I will not weary the reader with our further proceedings. Suffice it to say we marshalled our host and marched down to the Piazza. The news had spread by now, and in the dimly breaking morning light we saw the Square full of people—men, women, and children. As we marched in there was a cheer, not very hearty—a cheer propitiatory, for they did not know what we meant to do. The colonel made them a brief speech, promising peace, security, liberty, plenty, and all the goods of heaven. In a few stern words he cautioned them against "treachery," and announced that any rebellion against the Provisional Government would meet with swift punishment. Then he posted his army in companies, to keep watch till all was quiet. And at last he said:

"Now, Martin, come back to the Golden House, and let's put that fellow in a safe place."

"Yes," said I; "and have a look for the money." For really, in the excitement, it seemed as if there was a danger of the most important thing of all being forgotten.

The dawn was now far advanced, and as we left the Piazza, we could see the Golden House at the other end of the avenue. All looked quiet, and the sentries were gently pacing to and fro. Drawing nearer, we saw two or three of the President's servants busied about their ordinary tasks. One



## TWO SURPRISES

woman was already deleting Johnny Carr's life-blood with a mop and a pail of water; and a carpenter was at work repairing the front-door. Standing by it was the doctor's brougham.

"Come to see Carr, I suppose," said I.

Leaving our horses to the care of the men who were with us we entered the house. Just inside we met the doctor himself. He was a shrewd little fellow, named Anderson, generally popular and, though a personal friend of the President's, not openly identified with either political party.

"I have a request to make to you, sir," he said to McGregor, "about Mr. Carr."

"Well, is he dead?" said the colonel. "If he is, he's got only himself to thank for it."

The doctor wisely declined to discuss this question, and confined himself to stating that Johnny was not dead. On the contrary, he was going on nicely.

"But," he went on, "quiet is essential, and I want to take him to my house, out of the racket. No doubt it is pretty quiet here now, but——"

The colonel interrupted:

"Will he give his *parole* not to escape?"

"My dear sir," said the doctor, "the man couldn't move to save his life—and he's asleep now."

"You must wake him up to move him, I suppose," said the colonel. "But you may take him. Let me know when he's well enough to see me. Meanwhile I hold you responsible for his good behaviour."

"Certainly," said the doctor. "I am content to be responsible for Mr. Carr."

"All right; take him and get out. Now for Whittingham!"



## A MAN OF MARK

“Hadn’t we better get the money first?” said I.

“Damn the money!” he replied. “But I tell you what—I must have a bit of food. I’ve tasted nothing for twelve hours.”

One of the servants hearing him, said:

“Breakfast can be served in a moment, sir.” And he ushered us into the large dining-room, where we soon had an excellent meal.

When we had got through most of it, I broke the silence by asking:

“What are you going to do with him?”

“I should like to shoot him,” said the colonel.

“On what charge?”

“Treachery,” he replied.

I smiled.

“That would hardly do, would it?”

“Well, then, embezzlement of public funds.”

We had a little talk about the President’s destiny, and I tried to persuade the colonel to milder measures. In fact, I was determined to prevent such a murder if I could without ruin to myself.

“Well, we’ll consider it when we’ve seen him,” said the colonel, rising and lighting a cigarette. “By Jove! we’ve wasted an hour breakfasting—it’s seven o’clock.”

I followed him along the passage, and we entered the little room where we had left the President. The sentries were still there, each seated in an arm-chair. They were not asleep, but looked a little drowsy.

“All right?” said the colonel.

“Yes, Excellency,” said one of them. “He is in there in bed.”

He went into the inner room and began to undo the shutters, letting in the early sun.



## TWO SURPRISES

We passed through the half-opened door and saw a peaceful figure lying in the bed, whence proceeded a gentle snore.

“Good nerve, hasn’t he?” said the colonel.

“Yes; but what a queer night-cap!” I said, for the President’s head was swathed in white linen.

The colonel strode quickly up to the bed.

“Done, by hell!” he cried. “It’s Johnny Carr!”

It was true; there lay Johnny. His Excellency was nowhere to be seen.

The colonel shook Johnny roughly by the arm. The latter opened his eyes and said sleepily:

“Steady there. Kindly remember I’m a trifle fragile.”

“What’s this infernal plot? Where’s Whittingham?”

“Ah, it’s McGregor,” said Johnny, with a bland smile, “and Martin. How are you, old fellow? Some beast’s hit me on the head.”

“Where’s Whittingham?” reiterated the colonel, savagely shaking Johnny’s arm.

“Gently!” said I; “after all, he’s a sick man.”

The colonel dropped the arm with a muttered oath, and Johnny said, sweetly:

“Quits, isn’t it, colonel?”

The colonel turned from him, and said to his men sternly:

“Have you had any hand in this?”

They protested vehemently that they were as astonished as we were; and so they were, unless they acted consummately. They denied that anyone had entered the outer room or that any sound had proceeded from the inner. They swore they



## A MAN OF MARK

had kept vigilant watch, and must have seen an intruder. Both the men inside were the colonel's personal servants, and he believed their honesty; but what of their vigilance?

Carr heard him sternly questioning them, on which he said :

"Those chaps aren't to blame, colonel. I didn't come in that way. If you'll take a look behind the bed, you'll see another door. They brought me in there. I was rather queer and only half knew what was up."

We looked and saw a door where he said. Pushing the bed aside, we opened it, and found ourselves on the back staircase of the premises. Clearly the President had noiselessly opened this door and got out. But how had Carr got in without noise?

The sentry came up, and said :

"Every five minutes, sir, I looked and saw him on the bed. He lay for the first hour in his clothes. The next look, he was undressed. It struck me he'd been pretty quick and quiet about it, but I thought no more."

"Depend upon it, the dressed man was the President, the undressed man Carr! When was that?"

"About half-past two, sir; just after the doctor came."

"The doctor!" we cried.

"Yes, sir; Dr. Anderson."

"You never told me he had been here."

"He never went into the President's—into General Whittingham's room, sir; but he came in here for five minutes, to get some brandy, and stood talking with us for a time. Half an hour after he came in for some more."



## TWO SURPRISES

We began to see how it was done. That wretched little doctor was in the plot. Somehow or other he had communicated with the President; probably he knew of the door. Then, I fancied, they must have worked something in this way. The doctor comes in to distract the sentries, while his Excellency moves the bed. Finding that they took a look every five minutes, he told the President. Then he went and got Johnny Carr ready. Returning, he takes the President's place on the bed, and in that character undergoes an inspection. The moment this is over, he leaps up and goes out. Between them they bring in Carr, put him into bed, and slip out through the narrow space of open door behind the bedstead. When all was done, the doctor had come back to see if any suspicion had been aroused.

"I have it now!" cried the colonel. "That infernal doctor's done us both. He couldn't get Whittingham out of the house without leave, so he's taken him as Carr! Swindled me into giving my leave. Ah, look out, if we meet, Mr. Doctor!"

We rushed out of the house and found this conjecture was true. The man who purported to be Carr had been carried out, enveloped in blankets, just as we sat down to breakfast; the doctor had put him into the carriage, followed himself, and driven rapidly away.

"Which way did they go?"

"Toward the harbour, sir," the sentry replied.

The harbour could be reached in twenty minutes' fast driving. Without a word the colonel sprang on his horse; I imitated him, and we galloped as hard as we could, everyone making way before our



## A MAN OF MARK

furious charge. Alas! we were too late. As we drew rein on the quay we saw, half a mile out to sea and sailing before a stiff breeze, Johnny Carr's little yacht, with the Aureataland flag floating defiantly at her masthead.

We gazed at it blankly, with never a word to say, and turned our horses' heads. Our attention was attracted by a small group of men standing round the storm-signal post. As we rode up, they hastily scattered, and we saw pinned to the post a sheet of note-paper. Thereupon was written in a well-known hand:

"I, Marcus W. Whittingham, President of the Republic of Aureataland, hereby offer a REWARD of FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS and a FREE PARDON to any person or persons assisting in the CAPTURE, ALIVE or DEAD, of GEORGE MCGREGOR (late Colonel in the Aureataland Army) and JOHN MARTIN, Bank Manager, and I do further proclaim the said George McGregor and John Martin to be traitors and rebels against the Republic, and do pronounce their lives forfeited. Which sentence let every loyal citizen observe at his peril.

"MARCUS W. WHITTINGHAM,  
"President."

Truly, this was pleasant!



## CHAPTER XI

### DIVIDING THE SPOILS

THE habit of reading having penetrated, as we are told, to all classes of the community, I am not without hope that some who peruse this chronicle will be able, from personal experience, to understand the feelings of a man when he first finds a reward offered for his apprehension. It is true that our police are not in the habit of imitating the President's naked brutality by expressly adding "Alive or Dead," but I am informed that the law, in case of need, leaves the alternative open to the servants of justice. I am not ashamed to confess that my spirits were rather dashed by his Excellency's Parthian shot, and I could see that the colonel himself was no less perturbed. The escape of *Fleance* seemed to *Macbeth* to render his whole position unsafe, and no one who knew General Whittingham will doubt that he was a more dangerous opponent than *Fleance*. We both felt, in fact, as soon as we saw the white sail of *The Songstress* bearing our enemy out of our reach, that the revolution could not yet be regarded as safely accomplished. But the uncertainty of our tenure of power did not paralyse our energies; on the contrary, we determined to make hay while the sun shone, and, if Aureataland was doomed to succumb once more to tyranny, I, for one, was very clear that her temporary emancipation might be turned to good account.

Accordingly, on arriving again at the Golden



## A MAN OF MARK

House, we lost no time in instituting a thorough inquiry into the state of the public finances. We ransacked the house from top to bottom and found nothing! Was it possible that the President had carried off with him all the treasure that had inspired our patriotic efforts? The thought was too horrible. The drawers of his escritoire and the safe that stood in his library revealed nothing to our eager eyes. A foraging party, despatched to the Ministry of Finance (where, by the way, they did not find Don Antonio or his fair daughter), returned with the discouraging news that nothing was visible but ledgers and bills (not negotiable securities—the other sort). In deep dejection I threw myself into his Excellency's chair and lit one of his praiseworthy cigars with the doleful reflection that this pleasure seemed all I was likely to get out of the business. The colonel stood moodily with his back to the fireplace, looking at me as if I were responsible for the state of things.

At this point in came the signorina. We greeted her gloomily, and she was as startled as ourselves at the news of the President's escape; at the same time I thought I detected an undercurrent of relief, not unnatural if we recollect her personal relations with the deposed ruler. When, however, we went on to break to her the nakedness of the land, she stopped us at once.

“Oh, you stupid men! you haven't looked in the right place. I suppose you expected to find it laid out for you on the dining-room table. Come with me.”

We followed her into the room where Carr lay. He was awake, and the signorina went and asked him how he was. Then she continued;



## DIVIDING THE SPOILS

“ We shall have to disturb you for a few minutes, Mr. Carr. You don't mind, do you ? ”

“ Must I get out of bed ? ” asked Johnny.

“ Certainly not while I'm here,” said the signorina. “ You've only got to shut your eyes and lie still ; but we're going to make a little noise.”

There was in the room, as perhaps might be expected, a washing-stand. This article was of the description one often sees ; above the level of the stand itself there rose a wooden screen to the height of two feet and a half, covered with pretty tiles, the presumable object being to protect the wall paper. I never saw a more innocent-looking bit of furniture ; it might have stood in a lady's dressing-room. The signorina went up to it and *slid* it gently on one side ; it moved in a groove ! Then she pressed a spot in the wall behind and a small piece of it rolled aside, disclosing a key-hole.

“ He's taken the key, of course,” she said. “ We must break it open. Who's got a hammer ? ”

Tools were procured, and, working under the signorina's directions, after a good deal of trouble, we laid bare a neat little safe embedded in the wall. This safe was legibly inscribed on the outside “ Burglar's Puzzle.” We, however, were not afraid of making a noise, and it only puzzled us for ten minutes.

When opened it revealed a Golconda ! There lay in securities and cash no less than five hundred thousand dollars !

We smiled at one another.

“ A sad revelation ! ” I remarked.

“ Hoary old fox ! ” said the colonel.

No wonder the harbour works were unremunera-



## A MAN OF MARK

tive in their early stages. The President must have kept them at a very early stage.

"What are you people up to?" cried Carr.

"Rank burglary, my dear boy," I replied, and we retreated with our spoil.

"Now," said I to the colonel, "what are you going to do?"

"Why, what do you think, Mr. Martin?" interposed the signorina. "He's going to give you your money, and divide the rest with his sincere friend Christina Nugent."

"Well, I suppose so," said the colonel. "But it strikes me you're making a good thing of this, Martin."

"My dear colonel," said I, "a bargain is a bargain; and where would you have been without my money?"

The colonel made no reply, but handed me the money, which I liked much better. I took the three hundred and twenty thousand dollars and said:

"Now, I can face the world, an honest man."

The signorina laughed.

"*I* am glad," she said, "chiefly for poor old Jones' sake. It'll take a load off his mind."

The colonel proceeded to divide the remainder into two little heaps, of which he pushed one over to the signorina. She took it gayly, and said:

"Now I shall make curl papers of half my bonds, and I shall rely on the—what do you call it?—the Provisional Government to pay the rest. You remember about the house?"

"I'll see about that soon," said the colonel impatiently. "You two seem to think there's nothing to do but take the money. You forget we've got to make our position safe."



## DIVIDING THE SPOILS

"Exactly. The colonel's government must be carried on," said I.

The signorina did not catch the allusion. She yawned, and said :

"Oh, then, I shall go. Rely on my loyalty, your Excellency."

She made him a courtesy and went to the door. As I opened it for her she whispered, "Horrid old bear ! Come and see me, Jack," and so vanished, carrying off her dollars.

I returned and sat down opposite the colonel.

"I wonder how she knew about the washstand," I remarked.

"Because Whittingham was fool enough to tell her, I suppose," said the colonel testily, as if he disliked the subject.

Then we settled to business. This unambitious tale does not profess to be a complete history of Aureataland, and I will spare my readers the recital of our discussion. We decided at last that matters were still so critical, owing to the President's escape, that the ordinary forms of law and constitutional government must be temporarily suspended. The Chamber was not in session, which made this course easier. The colonel was to be proclaimed President and to assume supreme power under martial law for some weeks, while we looked about us. It was thought better that my name should not appear officially, but I agreed to take in hand, under his supervision, all matters relating to finance.

"We can't pay the interest on the real debt," he said.

"No," I replied ; "you must issue a notice, setting forth that, owing to General Whittingham's



## A MAN OF MARK

malversations, payments must be temporarily suspended. Promise it will be all right later on."

"Very good," said he; "and now I shall go and look up those officers. I must keep them in good temper, and the men too. I shall give 'em another ten thousand."

"Generous hero!" said I, "and I shall go and restore this cash to my employers."

It was twelve o'clock when I left the Golden House and strolled quietly down to Liberty Street. The larger part of the soldiers had been drawn off, but a couple of companies still kept guard in the Piazza. The usual occupations of life were going on amid a confused stir of excitement, and I saw by the interest my appearance aroused that some part at least of my share in the night's doing had leaked out. The *Gazette* had published a special edition, in which it hailed the advent of freedom, and, while lauding McGregor to the skies, bestowed a warm commendation on the "noble Englishman who, with a native love of liberty, had taken on himself the burden of Aureataland in her hour of travail." The metaphor struck me as inappropriate, but the sentiment was most healthy; and when I finally beheld two officers of police sitting on the head of a drunken man for toasting the fallen *régime*, I could say to myself, as I turned into the bank, "Order reigns in Warsaw."

General assent had proclaimed a suspension of commerce on this auspicious day, and I found Jones sitting idle and ill at ease. I explained to him the state of affairs, showing how the President's dishonourable scheme had compelled me, in the interests of the bank, to take a more or less active part in the revolution. It was pathetic to



## DIVIDING THE SPOILS

hear him bewail the villainy of the man he had trusted, and when I produced the money he blessed me fervently, and at once proposed writing to the directors a full account of the matter.

"They are bound to vote you an honorarium, sir," he said.

"I don't know, Jones," I replied. "I am afraid there is a certain prejudice against me at headquarters. But in any case I have resolved to forego the personal advantage that might accrue to me from my conduct. President McGregor has made a strong representation to me that the schemes of General Whittingham, if publicly known, would, however unjustly, prejudice the credit of Aureataland, and he appealed to me not to give particulars to the world. In matters such as these, Jones, we cannot be guided solely by selfish considerations."

"God forbid, sir!" said Jones, much moved.

"I have, therefore, consented to restrict myself to a confidential communication to the directors; they must judge how far they will pass it on to the shareholders. To the world at large I shall say nothing of the second loan; and I know you will oblige me by treating this money as the product of realisations in the ordinary course of business. The recent disturbances will quite account for so large a sum being called in."

"I don't quite see how I can arrange that."

"Ah, you are overdone," said I. "Leave it all to me, Jones."

And this I persuaded him to do. In fact, he was so relieved at seeing the money back that he was easy to deal with; and if he suspected anything, he was overawed by my present exalted po-



## A MAN OF MARK

sition. He appeared to forget what I could not, that the President, no doubt, still possessed that fatal cable!

After lunch I remembered my engagement with the signorina, and, putting on my hat, was bidding farewell to business, when Jones said:

“There’s a note just come for you, sir. A little boy brought it while you were out at lunch.”

He gave it me—a little dirty envelope, with an illiterate scrawl. I opened it carelessly, but as my eye fell on the President’s hand, I started in amazement. The note was dated “Saturday—From on board *The Songstress*,” and ran as follows:

“DEAR MR. MARTIN: I must confess to having underrated your courage and abilities. If you care to put them at my disposal now, I will accept them. In the other event, I must refer you to my public announcement. In any case it may be useful to you to know that McGregor designs to marry Signorina Nugent. I fear that on my return it will be hardly consistent with my public duties to spare your life (unless you accept my present offer), but I shall always look back to your acquaintance with pleasure. I have, if you will allow me to say so, seldom met a young man with such natural gifts for finance and politics. I shall anchor five miles out from Whittingham to-night (for I know you have no ships), and if you join me, well and good. If not, I shall consider your decision irrevocable.

“Believe me, dear Mr. Martin, faithfully yours,

“MARCUS W. WHITTINGHAM,

“President of the Republic  
of Aureataland.”



## DIVIDING THE SPOILS

It is a pleasant thing, as has been remarked, *laudari a laudato viro*, and the President's praise was grateful to me. But I did not see my way to fall in with his views. He said nothing about the money, but I knew well that its return would be a condition of any alliance between us. Again, I was sure that he also "designed to marry the signorina," and, if I must have a rival on the spot, I preferred McGregor in that capacity. Lastly, I thought that, after all, there is a decency in things, and I had better stick to my party. I did not, however, tell McGregor about the letter, merely sending him a line to say I had heard that *The Songstress* was hovering a few miles off, and he had better look out.

This done, I resumed my interrupted progress to the signorina's. When I was shown in, she greeted me kindly.

"I have had a letter from the President," I said.

"Yes," said she, "he told me he had written to you."

"Why, have you heard from him?"

"Yes, just a little note. He is rather cross with me."

"I can quite understand that. Would you like to see my letter?"

"Oh, yes," she replied carelessly.

She read it through and asked:

"Well, are you going over to him—going to forsake me?"

"How can you ask me? Won't you show me your letter, Christina?"

"No, John," she answered, mimicking my impassioned tones. "I may steal the President's savings, but I respect his confidence."



## A MAN OF MARK

"You see what he says to me about McGregor."

"Yes," said the signorina. "It is not, you know, news to me. But, curious to relate, the colonel has just been here himself and told me the same thing. The colonel has not a nice way of making love, Jack—not so nice as yours nearly."

Thus encouraged, I went and sat down by her. I believe I took her hand.

"You don't love him?"

"Not at all," she replied.

I must beg to be excused recording the exact terms in which I placed my hand and heart at the signorina's disposal. I was extremely vehement and highly absurd, but she did not appear to be displeased.

"I like you very much, Jack," she said, "and it's very sweet of you to have made a revolution for me. It was for me, Jack?"

"Of course it was, my darling," I promptly replied.

"But you know, Jack, I don't see how we're much better off. Indeed, in a way it's worse. The President wouldn't let anybody else marry me, but he wasn't so peremptory as the colonel. The colonel declares he will marry me this day week!"

"We'll see about that," said I savagely.

"Another revolution, Jack?" asked the signorina.

"You needn't laugh at me," I said sulkily.

"Poor boy! What are we idyllic lovers to do?"

"I don't believe you're a bit in earnest."

"Yes, I am, Jack—now." Then she went on, with a sort of playful pity, "Look at my savage, jealous, broken-hearted Jack."



## DIVIDING THE SPOILS

I caught her in my arms and kissed her, whispering hotly:

“You will be true to me, sweet?”

“Let me go,” she said. Then, leaning over me as I flung myself back in a chair, “It’s pleasant while it lasts; try not to be broken-hearted if it doesn’t last.”

“If you love me, why don’t you come with me out of this sink of iniquity?”

“Run away with you?” she asked, with open amazement. “Do you think that we’re the sort of people for a romantic elopement? I am very earthy. And so are you, Jack, dear—nice earth, but earth, Jack.”

There was a good deal of truth in this remark. We were not an ideal pair for love in a cottage.

“Yes,” I said. “I’ve got no money.”

“I’ve got a little money, but not much. I’ve been paying debts,” she added proudly.

“I haven’t been even doing that. And I’m not quite equal to purloining that three hundred thousand dollars.”

“We must wait, Jack. But this I will promise. I’ll never marry the colonel. If it comes to that or running away, we’ll run away.”

“And Whittingham?”

The signorina for once looked grave.

“You know him,” she said. “Think what he made you do! and you’re not a weak man, or I shouldn’t be fond of you. Jack, you must keep him away from me.”

She was quite agitated; and it was one more tribute to the President’s powers that he should exert so strange an influence over such a nature. I was burning to ask her more about herself and the



## A MAN OF MARK

President, but I could not while she was distressed. And when I had comforted her, she resolutely declined to return to the subject.

“No, go away now,” she said. “Think how we are to checkmate our two Presidents. And, Jack! whatever happens, I got you back the money. I’ve done you some good. So be kind to me. I’m not very much afraid of your heart breaking. In fact, Jack, we are neither of us good young people. No, no ; be quiet and go away. You have plenty of useful things to occupy your time.”

At last I accepted my dismissal and walked off, my happiness considerably damped by the awkward predicament in which we stood. Clearly McGregor meant business ; and at this moment McGregor was all-powerful. If he kept the reins, I should lose my love. If the President came back, a worse fate still threatened. Supposing it were possible to carry off the signorina, which I doubted very much, where were we to go to ? And would she come ?

On the whole, I did not think she would come.



## CHAPTER XII

### BETWEEN TWO FIRES

IN spite of my many anxieties, after this eventful day I enjoyed the first decent night's rest I had had for a week. The colonel refused, with an unnecessary ostentation of scorn, my patriotic offer to keep watch and ward over the city, and I turned in, tired out, at eleven o'clock, after a light dinner and a meditative pipe. I felt I had some reasons for self-congratulation ; for considerable as my present difficulties were, yet I undoubtedly stood in a more hopeful position than I had before the revolution. I was now resolved to get my money safe out of the country, and I had hopes of being too much for McGregor in the other matter which shared my thoughts.

The return of day, however, brought new troubles. I was roused at an early hour by a visit from the colonel himself. He brought very disquieting tidings. In the course of the night every one of our proclamations had been torn down or defaced with ribald scribblings ; posted over or alongside them, there now hung multitudinous enlarged copies of the President's offensive notice. How or by whom these seditious measures had been effected we were at a loss to tell, for the officers and troops were loud in declaring their vigilance. In the very centre of the Piazza, on the base of the President's statue, was posted an enormous bill :  
“ REMEMBER 1871 ! DEATH TO TRAITORS ! ”

“ How could they do that unless the soldiers



## A MAN OF MARK

were in it?" asked the colonel gloomily. "I have sent those two companies back to barracks and had another lot out. But how do I know they'll be any better? I met DeChair just now and asked him what the temper of the troops was. The little brute grinned, and said, 'Ah, mon Président, it would be better if the good soldiers had a leetle more money.'"

"That's about it," said I; "but then you haven't got much more money."

"What I've got I mean to stick to," said the colonel. "If this thing is going to burst up, I'm not going to be kicked out to starve. I tell you what it is, Martin, you must let me have some of that cash back again."

The effrontery of this request amazed me. I was just drawing on the second leg of my trousers (for it was impossible to be comfortable in bed with that great creature fuming about), and I stopped with one leg in mid-air and gazed at him.

"Well, what's the matter? Why are you to dance out with all the plunder?" he asked.

The man's want of ordinary morality was too revolting. Didn't he know very well that the money wasn't mine? Didn't he himself obtain my help on the express terms that I should have this money to repay the bank with? I finished putting on my garments, and then I replied:

"Not a farthing, colonel; not a damned farthing! By our agreement that cash was to be mine; but for that I wouldn't have touched your revolution with a pair of tongs."

He looked very savage, and muttered something under his breath.

"You're carrying things with a high hand," he said.



## BETWEEN TWO FIRES

"I'm not going to steal to please you," said I.

"You weren't always so scrupulous," he sneered.

I took no notice of this insult, but repeated my determination.

"Look here, Martin," he said, "I'll give you twenty-four hours to think it over; and let me advise you to change your mind by then. I don't want to quarrel, but I'm going to have some of that money."

Clearly he had learned statecraft in his predecessor's school! "Twenty-four hours is something," thought I, and determined to try the cunning of the serpent.

"All right, colonel," I said, "I'll think it over. I don't pretend to like it; but, after all, I'm in with you and we must pull together. We'll see how things look to-morrow morning."

"There's another matter I wanted to speak to you about," he went on.

I was now dressed, so I invited him into the breakfast-room, gave him a cup of coffee (which, to my credit, I didn't poison), and began on my own eggs and toast.

"Fire away," said I briefly.

"I suppose you know I'm going to be married?" he remarked.

"No, I hadn't heard," I replied, feigning to be entirely occupied with a very nimble egg. "Rather a busy time for marrying, isn't it? Who is she?"

He gave a heavy laugh.

"You needn't pretend to be so very innocent; I expect you could give a pretty good guess."

"Mme. Devarges?" I asked blandly. "Suitable match; about your age——"

"I wish to the devil you wouldn't try to be



## A MAN OF MARK

funny!" he exclaimed. "You know as well as I do it's the signorina."

"Really?" I replied. "Well, well! I fancied you were a little touched in that quarter. And she has consented to make you happy?"

I was curious to see what he would say. I knew he was a bad liar, and, as a fact, I believe he told the truth on this occasion, for he answered:

"Says she never cared a straw for anyone else."

Oh, signorina!

"Not even Whittingham?" I asked maliciously.

"Hates the old ruffian!" said the colonel. "I once thought she had a liking for you, Martin, but she laughed at the idea. I'm glad of it, for we should have fallen out."

I smiled in a somewhat sickly way, and took refuge in my cup. When I emerged, I asked:

"And when is it to be?"

"Next Saturday."

"So soon?"

"Yes," he said. "Fact is, between you and me, Martin, she's ready enough."

This was too disgusting. But whether the colonel was deceiving me, or the signorina had deceived him, I didn't know—a little bit of both, probably. I saw, however, what the colonel's game was plainly enough; he was, in his clumsy way, warning me off his preserves, for, of course, he knew my pretensions, and probably that they had met with some success, and I don't think I imposed on him very much. But I was anxious to avoid a rupture and gain time.

"I must call and congratulate the lady," I said.

The colonel couldn't very well object to that, but he didn't like it.



## BETWEEN TWO FIRES

"Well, Christina told me she was very busy, but I dare say she'll see you for a few minutes."

"I dare say she will," I said dryly.

"I must be off now. I shall have to be about all day, trying to catch those infernal fellows who destroyed the bills."

"You won't be doing any business to-day, then?"

"What, about settling the Government?" he asked, grinning. "Not just yet. Wait till I've got the signorina and the money, and then we'll see about that. You think about the money, my boy!"

Much to my relief he then departed, and as he went out I swore that neither signorina nor money should he ever have. In the course of the next twenty-four hours I must find a way to prevent him.

"Rather early for a call," said I, "but I must see the signorina."

On my way up I met several people, and heard some interesting facts. In the first place, no trace had appeared of Don Antonio and his daughter; rumour declared that they had embarked on *The Songstress* with the President and his faithful doctor. Secondly, Johnny Carr was still in bed at the Golden House (this from Mme. Devarges, who had been to see him); but his men had disappeared, after solemnly taking the oath to the new Government. Item three: The colonel had been received with silence and black looks by the troops, and two officers had vanished into space, both Americans, and the only men of any good in a fight. Things were looking rather blue, and I began to think that I also should like to disappear, provided I could carry off my money and my mistress with me. My



## A MAN OF MARK

scruples about loyalty had been removed by the colonel's overbearing conduct, and I was ready for any step that promised me the fulfilment of my own designs. It was pretty evident that there would be no living with McGregor in his present frame of mind, and I was convinced that my best course would be to cut the whole thing, or, if that proved impossible, to see what bargain I could make with the President. Of course, all would go smoothly with him if I gave up the dollars and the lady; a like sacrifice would conciliate McGregor. But then, I didn't mean to make it.

"One or other I will have," said I, as I knocked at the door of "Mon Repos," "and both if possible."

The signorina was looking worried; indeed, I thought she had been crying.

"Did you meet my aunt on your way up?" she asked, the moment I was announced.

"No," said I.

"I've sent her away," she continued. "All this fuss frightens her, so I got the colonel's leave (for you know we mustn't move without permission now liberty has triumphed) for her to seek change of air."

"Where's she going to?" I said.

"Home," said the signorina.

I didn't know where "home" was, but I never ask what I am not meant to know.

"Are you left alone?"

"Yes. I know it's not correct. But you see, Jack, I had to choose between care for my money and care for my reputation. The latter is always safe in my own keeping; the former I wasn't so sure about."



## BETWEEN TWO FIRES

"Oh, so you've given it to Mrs. Carrington?"

"Yes, all but five thousand dollars."

"Does the colonel know that?"

"Dear me, of course not! or he'd never have let her go."

"You're very wise," said I. "I only wish I could have sent my money with her."

"I'm afraid that would have made dear aunt rather bulky," said the signorina, tittering.

"Yes, such a lot of mine's in cash," I said regretfully. "But won't they find it on her?"

"Not if they're gentlemen," replied the signorina darkly.

Evidently I could not ask for further details; so, without more ado, I disclosed my own perilous condition and the colonel's boasts about herself.

"What a villain that man is!" she exclaimed. "Of course, I was civil to him, but I didn't say half that. You didn't believe I did, Jack?"

There's never any use in being unpleasant, so I said I had rejected the idea with scorn.

"But what's to be done? If I'm here to-morrow, he'll take the money, and, as likely as not, cut my throat if I try to stop him."

"Yes, and he'll marry me," chimed in the signorina. "Jack, we must have a counter-revolution."

"I don't see what good that'll do," I answered dolefully. "The President will take the money just the same, and I expect he'll marry you just the same."

"Of the two, I would rather have him. Now don't rage, Jack! I only said, 'of the two.' But you're quite right; it couldn't help us much to bring General Whittingham back."



## A MAN OF MARK

"To say nothing of the strong probability of my perishing in the attempt."

"Let me think," said the signorina, knitting her brows.

"May I light a cigarette and help you?"

She nodded permission, and I awaited the result of her meditation.

She sat there, looking very thoughtful and troubled, but it seemed to me as if she were rather undergoing a conflict of feeling than thinking out a course of action. Once she glanced at me, then turned away with a restless movement and a sigh.

I finished my cigarette, and flinging it away, strolled up to the window to look out. I had stood there a little while, when I heard her call softly:

"Jack!"

I turned and came to her, kneeling down by her side and taking her hands.

She gazed rather intently into my face with unusual gravity. Then she said:

"If you have to choose between me and the money, which will it be?"

I kissed her hand for answer.

"If the money is lost, won't it all come out? And then, won't they call you dishonest?"

"I suppose so," said I.

"You don't mind that?"

"Yes, I do. Nobody likes being called a thief—especially when there's a kind of truth about it. But I should mind losing you more."

"Are you really very fond of me, Jack? No, you needn't say so. I think you are. Now I'll tell you a secret. If you hadn't come here, I should have married General Whittingham long ago. I stayed here intending to do it (oh, yes, I'm



## BETWEEN TWO FIRES

not a nice girl, Jack), and he asked me very soon after you first arrived. I gave him my money, you know, then."

I was listening intently. It seemed as if some things were going to be cleared up.

"Well," she continued, "you know what happened. You fell in love with me—I tried to make you ; and then I suppose I fell a little in love with you. At any rate I told the President I wouldn't marry him just then. Some time after, I wanted some money, and I asked him to give me back mine. He utterly refused ; you know his quiet way. He said he would keep it for 'Mrs. Whittingham.' Oh, I could have killed him! But I didn't dare to break with him openly ; besides, he's very hard to fight against. We had constant disputes ; he would never give back the money, and I declared I wouldn't marry him unless I had it first, and not then unless I chose. He was very angry and swore I should marry him without a penny of it ; and so it went on. But he never suspected you, Jack ; not till quite the end. Then we found out about the debt, you know ; and about the same time I saw he at last suspected something between you and me. And the very day before we came to the bank he drove me to desperation. He stood beside me in this room, and said, 'Christina, I am growing old. I shall wait no longer. I believe you're in love with that young Martin.' Then he apologised for his plain speaking, for he's always gentle in manner. And I defied him. And then, Jack, what do you think he did?"

I sprang up in a fury.

"What?" I cried.

"He *laughed!*" said the signorina, with tragic



## A MAN OF MARK

intensity. "I couldn't stand that, so I joined the colonel in upsetting him. Ah, he shouldn't have laughed at me!"

And indeed she looked at this moment a dangerous subject for such treatment.

"I knew what no one else knew, and I could influence him as no one else could, and I had my revenge. But now," she said, "it all ends in nothing."

And she broke down, sobbing.

Then, recovering herself, and motioning me to be still, she went on:

"You may think, after holding him at bay so long, I have little to fear from the colonel. But it's different. The President has no scruples; but he is a gentleman—as far as women are concerned. I mean—he wouldn't——"

She stopped.

"But McGregor?" I asked, in a hoarse whisper. She drooped her head on my shoulder.

"I daren't stay here, Jack, with him," she whispered. "If you can't take me away, I must go to the President. I shall be at least safe with him!"

"Damn the ruffian!" I growled; not meaning the President, but his successor; "I'll shoot him!"

"No, no, Jack!" she cried. "You must be quiet and cautious. But I must go to-night—to-night, Jack, either with you or to the President."

"My darling, you shall come with me," said I.

"Where?"

"Oh, out of this somewhere."

"How are we to escape?"

"Now, you sit down, dear, and try to stop crying—you break my heart—and I'll think. It's my turn now."



## BETWEEN TWO FIRES

I carried her to the sofa, and she lay still, but with her eyes fixed on me. I was full of rage against McGregor, but I couldn't afford the luxury of indulging it, so I gave my whole mind to finding a way out for us. At last I seemed to hit upon a plan.

The signorina saw the inspiration in my eye. She jumped up and came to me.

"Have you got it, Jack?" she said.

"I think so—if you will trust yourself to me, and don't mind an uncomfortable night."

"Go on."

"You know my little steam launch? It will be dark to-night. If we can get on board with a couple of hours' start we can show anybody a clean pair of heels. She travels a good pace, and it's only fifty miles to safety and foreign soil. I shall land there a beggar!"

"I don't mind that, Jack," she said. "I have my five thousand, and aunt will join us with the rest. But how are we to get on board? Besides, O Jack! the President watches the coast every night with *The Songstress*—and you know she's got steam—Mr. Carr just had auxiliary steam put in."

"No," I said, "I didn't know about that. Look here, Christina; excuse the question, but can you communicate with the President?"

"Yes," she said, after a second's hesitation.

This was what I suspected.

"And will he believe what you tell him?"

"I don't know. He might and he might not. He'll probably act as if he didn't."

I appreciated the justice of this forecast of General Whittingham's measures.



## A MAN OF MARK

“Well, we must chance it,” I said. “At any rate, better be caught by him than stay here. We were, perhaps, a little hasty with that revolution of ours.”

“I never thought the colonel was so wicked,” said the signorina.

We had no time to waste in abusing our enemy; the question was how to outwit him. I unfolded my plan to the signorina, not at all disguising from her the difficulties, and even dangers, attendant upon it. Whatever may have been her mind before and after, she was at this moment either so overcome with her fear of the colonel, or so carried away by her feeling for me, that she made nothing of difficulties and laughed at dangers, pointing out that though failure would be ignominious, it could not substantially aggravate our present position. Whereas, if we succeeded——

The thought of success raised a prospect of bliss in which we revelled for a few minutes; then, warned by the stroke of twelve, we returned to business.

“Are you going to take any of the money away with you?” she asked.

“No,” said I, “I don’t think so. It would considerably increase the risk if I were seen hanging about the bank; you know he’s got spies all over the place. Besides, what good would it do? I couldn’t stick to it, and I’m not inclined to run any more risks merely to save the bank’s pocket. The bank hasn’t treated me so well as all that. I propose to rely on your bounty till I’ve time to turn round.”

“Now, shall I come for you?” I asked her when we had arranged the other details.



## BETWEEN TWO FIRES

"I think not," she said. "I believe the colonel has one of my servants in his pay. I can slip out by myself, but I couldn't manage so well if you were with me. The sight of you would excite curiosity. I will meet you at the bottom of Liberty Street."

"At two o'clock in the morning exactly, please. Don't come through the Piazza and Liberty Street. Come round by the drive. [This was a sort of boulevard encircling the town, where the aristocracy was wont to ride and drive.] Things ought to be pretty busy about the bank by then, and no one will notice you. You have a revolver?"

"Yes."

"All right. Don't hurt anyone if you can help it; but if you do, don't leave him to linger in agony. Now I'm off," I continued. "I suppose I'd better not come and see you again?"

"I'm afraid you mustn't, Jack. You've been here two hours already."

"I shall be in my rooms in the afternoon. If anything goes wrong, send your carriage down the street and have it stopped at the grocer's. I shall take that for a sign."

The signorina agreed, and we parted tenderly. My last words were:

"You'll send that message to Whittingham at once?"

"This moment," she said, as she waved me a kiss from the door of the room.



## CHAPTER XIII

### I WORK UPON HUMAN NATURE

I WAS evidently in for another day as unpleasantly exciting as the one I had spent before the revolution, and I reflected sadly that if a man once goes in for things of that kind, it's none so easy to pull up. Luckily, however, I had several things to occupy me, and was not left to fret the day away in idleness. First I turned my steps to the harbour. As I went I examined my pockets and found a sum total of \$950. This was my all, for of late I had deemed it wise to carry my fortune on my person. Well, this was enough for the present; the future must take care of itself. So I thought to myself as I went along with a light heart, my triumph in love easily outweighing all the troubles and dangers that beset me. Only land me safe out of Aureata-land with the signorina by my side, and I asked nothing more of fortune! Let the dead bury their dead, and the bank look after its dollars!

Thus musing, I came to the boat-house where my launch lay. She was a tidy little boat, and had the advantage of being workable by one man without any difficulty. All I had to arrange was how to embark in her unperceived. I summoned the boatman in charge, and questioned him closely about the probable state of the weather. He confidently assured me it would be fine but dark.

"Very well," said I, "I shall go fishing; start overnight, and have a shy at them at sunrise."



## I WORK UPON HUMAN NATURE

The man was rather astonished at my unwonted energy, but of course made no objection.

"What time shall you start, sir?" he asked.

"I want her ready by two," said I.

"Do you want me to go with you, sir?"

I pretended to consider, and then told him, to his obvious relief, that I could dispense with his services.

"Leave her at the end of your jetty," I said, "ready for me. She'll be all safe there, won't she?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Nobody'll be about, except the sentries, and they won't touch her."

I privately hoped that not even the sentries would be about, but I didn't say so.

"Of course, sir, I shall lock the gate. You've got your key?"

"Yes, all right, and here you are—and much obliged for your trouble."

Highly astonished and grateful at receiving a large tip for no obvious reason (rather a mistake on my part), the man was profuse in promising to make every arrangement for my comfort. Even when I asked for a few cushions, he dissembled his scorn and agreed to put them in.

"And mind you don't sit up," I said as I left him.

"I'm not likely to sit up if I'm not obliged," he answered. "Hope you'll have good sport, sir."

From the harbour I made my way straight to the Golden House. The colonel was rather surprised to see me again so soon, but when I told him I came on business, he put his occupations on one side and listened to me.

I began with some anxiety, for if he suspected



## A MAN OF MARK

my good faith all would be lost. However, I was always a good hand at a lie, and the colonel was not the President.

“I’ve come about that money question,” I said.

“Well, have you come to your senses?” he asked, with his habitual rudeness.

“I can’t give you the money—” I went on.

“The devil you can’t!” he broke in. “You sit there and tell me that? Do you know that if the soldiers don’t have money in a few hours, they’ll upset me? They’re ready to do it any minute. By Jove! I don’t know now, when I give an order, whether I shall be obeyed or get a bullet through my head.”

“Pray be calm!” said I. “You didn’t let me finish.”

“Let you finish!” he cried. “You seem to think jabber does everything. The end of it all is, that either you give me the money or I take it—and if you interfere, look out!”

“That was just what I was going to propose, if you hadn’t interrupted me,” I said quietly, but with inward exultation, for I saw he was just in the state of mind to walk eagerly into the trap I was preparing for him.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

I explained to him that it was impossible for me to give up the money. My reputation was at stake; it was my duty to die in defence of that money—a duty which, I hastened to add, I entertained no intention of performing.

“But,” I went on, “although I am bound not to surrender the money, I am not bound to anticipate a forcible seizure of it. In times of disturbance parties of ruffians often turn to plunder. Not even



## I WORK UPON HUMAN NATURE

the most rigorous precautions can guard against it. Now, it would be very possible that even to-night a band of such marauders might make an attack on the bank, and carry off all the money in the safe."

"Oh!" said the colonel, "that's the game, is it?"

"That," I replied, "is the game; and a very neat game too, if you'll play it properly."

"And what will they say in Europe, when they hear the Provisional Government is looting private property?"

"My dear colonel, you force me to much explanation. You will, of course, not appear in the matter."

"I should like to be there," he remarked. "If I weren't, the men mightn't catch the exact drift of the thing."

"You will be there, of course, but *incognito*. Look here, colonel, it's as plain as two peas. Give out that you're going to reconnoitre the coast and keep an eye on *The Songstress*. Draw off your companies from the Piazza on that pretence. Then take fifteen or twenty men you can trust—not more, for it's no use taking more than you can help, and resistance is out of the question. About two, when everything is quiet, surround the bank. Jones will open when you knock. Don't hurt him, but take him outside and keep him quiet. Go in and take the money. Here's the key of the safe. Then, if you like, set fire to the place."

"Bravo, my boy!" said the colonel. "There's stuff in you after all. Upon my word, I was afraid you were going to turn virtuous."

I laughed as wickedly as I could.

"And what are you going to get out of it?" he said. "I suppose that's coming next?"



## A MAN OF MARK

As the reader knows, I wasn't going to get anything out of it, except myself and the signorina. But it wouldn't do to tell the colonel that; he would not believe in disinterested conduct. So I bargained with him for a *douceur* of thirty thousand dollars, which he promised so readily that I strongly doubted whether he ever meant to pay it.

"Do you think there's any danger of Whittingham making an attack while we're engaged in the job?"

The colonel was, in common parlance, getting rather *warmer* than I liked.

It was necessary to mislead him.

"I don't think so," I replied. "He can't possibly have organized much of a party here yet. There's some discontent, no doubt, but not enough for him to rely on."

"There's plenty of discontent," said the colonel.

"There won't be in a couple of hours."

"Why not?"

"Why, because you're going down to the barracks to announce a fresh instalment of pay to the troops to-morrow morning—a handsome instalment."

"Yes," said he thoughtfully, "that ought to keep them quiet for one night. Fact is, they don't care twopence either for me or Whittingham; and if they think they'll get more out of me they'll stick to me."

Of course I assented. Indeed, it was true enough as long as the President was not on the spot; but I thought privately that the colonel did not allow enough for his rival's personal influence and prestige, if he once got face to face with the troops.



## I WORK UPON HUMAN NATURE

"Yes," the colonel went on, "I'll do that; and what's more, I'll put the people in good humour by sending down orders for free drink in the Piazza to-night."

"Delightfully old-fashioned and baronial," I remarked. "I think it's a good idea. Have a bon-fire, and make it complete. I don't suppose Whittingham dreams of any attempt, but it will make the riot even more plausible."

"At any rate, they'll all be too drunk to make trouble," said he.

"Well, that's about all, isn't it?" said I. "I shall be off. I've got to write to my directors and ask instructions for the investment of the money."

"You'll live to be hanged, Martin," said the colonel, with evident admiration.

"Not by you, eh, colonel? Whatever might have happened if I'd been obstinate! Hope I shall survive to dance at your wedding, anyhow. Less than a week now!"

"Yes," said he, "it's Sunday (though, by Jove! I'd forgotten it), and next Saturday's the day!"

He really looked quite the happy bridegroom as he said this, and I left him to contemplate his bliss.

"I would bet ten to one that day never comes," I thought, as I walked away. "Even if I don't win, I'll back the President to be back before that."

The colonel's greed had triumphed over his wits, and he had fallen into my snare with greater readiness than I could have hoped. The question remained, What would the President do when he got the signorina's letter? It may conduce to a better understanding of the position if I tell what that letter was. She gave it me to read over, after we



## A MAN OF MARK

had compiled it together, and I still have my copy. It ran as follows :

“ I can hardly hope you will trust me again, but if I betrayed you, you drove me to it. I have given them your money ; it is in the bank now. M. refuses to give it up, and the C. means to take it to-night. He will have only a few men, the rest not near. He will be at the bank at two, with about twenty men. Take your own measures. All here favour you. He threatens me violence unless I marry him at once. He watches *The Songstress*, but if you can leave her at anchor and land in a boat there will be no suspicion. I swear this is true ; do not punish me more by disbelieving me. I make no protest. But if you come back to me I will give you, in return for pardon, *anything you ask !*

CHRISTINA.

“ P. S.—M. and the C. are on bad terms, and M. will not be active against you.”

Upon the whole I thought this would bring him. I doubted whether he would believe very much in it, but it looked probable (indeed, it was word for word true, as far as it went), and held out a bait that he would find it hard to resist. Again, he was so fond of a bold stroke, and so devoid of fear, that it was very likely he could come and see if it were true. If, as we suspected, he already had a considerable body of adherents on shore, he could land and reconnoitre without very great danger of falling into the colonel's hands. Finally, even if he didn't come, we hoped the letter would be enough to divert his attention from any thought of fugitive boats and runaway lovers. I could have made the



## I WORK UPON HUMAN NATURE

terms of it even more alluring, but the signorina, with that extraordinarily distorted morality distinctive of her sex, refused to swear to anything literally untrue in a letter which was itself from beginning to end a monumental falsehood; though not a student of ethics, she was keenly alive to the distinction between the *expressio falsi* and the *suppressio veri*. The only passage she doubted about was the last, "If you come back to me." "But then he won't come back *to me* if I'm not there!" she exclaimed triumphantly. What happened to him after he landed—whether he cooked the colonel's goose or the colonel cooked his—I really could not afford to consider. As a matter of personal preference, I should have liked the former, but I did not allow any such considerations to influence my conduct. My only hope was that the killing would take long enough to leave time for our unobtrusive exit. At the same time, as a matter of betting, I would have laid long odds against McGregor.

To my mind it is nearly as difficult to be consistently selfish as to be absolutely unselfish. I had, at this crisis, every inducement to concentrate all my efforts on myself, but I could not get Jones out of my head. It was certainly improbable that Jones would try to resist the marauding party; but neither the colonel nor his chosen band were likely to be scrupulous, and it was impossible not to see that Jones might get a bullet through his head; indeed, I fancied such a step would rather commend itself to the colonel, as giving a *bona fide* look to the affair. Jones had often been a cause of great inconvenience to me, but I didn't wish to have his death on my conscience, so I was very glad when I



## A MAN OF MARK

happened to meet him on my way back from the Golden House, and seized the opportunity of giving him a friendly hint.

I took him and set him down beside me on a bench in the Piazza.

I was in no way disturbed by the curious glances of three soldiers who were evidently charged to keep an eye on the bank and my dealings with it.

I began by pledging Jones to absolute secrecy, and then I intimated to him, in a roundabout way, that the colonel and I were both very apprehensive of an attack on the bank.

“The town,” I said, “is in a most unsettled condition, and many dangerous characters are about. Under these circumstances I have felt compelled to leave the defence of our property in the hands of the Government. I have formally intimated to the authorities that we shall hold them responsible for any loss occasioned to us by public disorder. The colonel, in the name of the Government, has accepted that responsibility. I therefore desire to tell you, Mr. Jones, that, in the lamentable event of any attack on the bank, it will not be expected of you to expose your life by resistance. Such a sacrifice would be both uncalled for and useless; and I must instruct you that the Government insists that their measures shall not be put in danger of frustration by any rash conduct on our part. I am unable to be at the bank this evening; but in the event of any trouble you will oblige me by not attempting to meet force by force. You will yield, and we shall rely on our remedy against the Government in case of loss.”

These instructions so fully agreed with the natural bent of Jones' mind that he readily acquiesced in



## I WORK UPON HUMAN NATURE

them and expressed high appreciation of my foresight.

“Take care of yourself and Mrs. Jones, my dear fellow,” I concluded; “that is all you have to do, and I shall be satisfied.”

I parted from him affectionately, wondering if my path in life would ever cross the honest, stupid old fellow's again, and heartily hoping that his fortune would soon take him out of the rogue's nest in which he had been dwelling.



## CHAPTER XIV

### FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND

THE night came on, fair and still, clear and star-lit; but there was no moon and, outside the immediate neighbourhood of the main streets, the darkness was enough to favour our hope of escaping notice without being so intense as to embarrass our footsteps. Everything, in fact, seemed to be on our side, and I was full of buoyant confidence as I drank a last solitary glass to the success of our enterprise, put my revolver in my pocket, and, on the stroke of midnight, stole from my lodgings. I looked up toward the bank and dimly descried three or four motionless figures, whom I took to be sentries guarding the treasure. The street itself was almost deserted, but from where I stood I could see the Piazza crowded with a throng of people whose shouts and songs told me that the colonel's hospitality was being fully appreciated. There was dancing going on to the strains of the military band, and every sign showed that our good citizens intended, in familiar phrase, to make a night of it.

I walked swiftly and silently down to the jetty. Yes, the boat was all right! I looked to her fires, and left her moored by one rope ready to be launched into the calm black sea in an instant. Then I strolled along by the harbour side. Here I met a couple of sentries. Innocently I entered into conversation with them, condoling on their hard fate in being kept on duty while pleasure was at the



## FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND

helm in the Piazza. Gently deprecating such excess of caution, I pointed out to them the stationary lights of *The Songstress* four or five miles out to sea, and with a respectful smile at the colonel's uneasiness, left the seed I had sown to grow in prepared soil. I dared do no more, and had to trust for the rest of their natural inclination to the neglect of duty.

When I got back to the bottom of Liberty Street, I ensconced myself in the shelter of a little group of trees which stood at one side of the roadway. Just across the road, which ran at right angles to the street, the wood began, and a quarter of an hour's walk through its shades would bring us to the jetty where the boat lay. My trees made a perfect screen, and here I stood awaiting events. For some time nothing was audible but an ever-increasing tumult of joviality from the Piazza. But after about twenty minutes I awoke to the fact that a constant dribble of men, singly or in pairs, had begun to flow past me from the Piazza, down Liberty Street, across the road behind me, and into the wood. Some were in uniform, others dressed in common clothes; one or two I recognised as members of Johnny Carr's missing band. The strong contrast between the prevailing revelry and the stealthy, cautious air of these passers-by would alone have suggested that they were bent on business; putting two and two together I had not the least doubt that they were the President's adherents making their way down to the water's edge to receive their chief. So he was coming; the letter had done its work! Some fifty or more must have come and gone before the stream ceased, and I reflected, with great satisfaction, that the colonel was



## A MAN OF MARK

likely to have his hands very full in the next hour or two.

Half an hour or so passed uneventfully; the bonfire still blazed; the songs and dancing were still in full swing. I was close upon the fearful hour of two, when, looking from my hiding-place, I saw a slight figure in black coming quickly and fearfully along the road.

I recognised the signorina at once, as I should recognise her any day among a thousand; and, as she paused nearly opposite where I was, I gently called her name and showed myself for a moment. She ran to me at once.

“Is it all right?” she asked breathlessly.

“We shall see in a moment,” said I. “The attack is coming off; it will begin directly.”

But the attack was not the next thing we saw. We had both retreated again to the friendly shadow whence we could see without being seen. Hardly had we settled ourselves than the signorina whispered to me, pointing across the road to the wood:

“What’s that, Jack?”

I followed the line of her finger and made out a row of figures standing motionless and still on the very edge of the wood. It was too dark to distinguish individuals; but, even as we looked, the silent air wafted to our eager ears a low-voiced word of command:

“Mind, not a sound till I give the word.”

“The President!” exclaimed the signorina, in a loud whisper.

“Hush, or he’ll hear,” said I, “and we’re done.”

Clearly nothing would happen from that quarter



## FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND

till it was called forth by events in the opposite direction. The signorina was strongly agitated; she clung to me closely, and I saw with alarm that the very proximity of the man she stood in such awe of was too much for her composure. When I had soothed, and I fear half-frightened, her into stillness, I again turned my eyes toward the Piazza. The fire had at last flickered out and the revels seemed on the wane. Suddenly a body of men appeared in close order, marching down the street toward the bank. We stood perhaps a hundred yards from that building, which was, in its turn, about two hundred from the Piazza. Steadily they came along; no sound reached us from the wood.

"This is getting interesting," I said. "There'll be trouble soon."

As near as I could see, the colonel's band, for such it was, no doubt, did not number more than five-and-twenty at the outside. Now they were at the bank. I could hardly see what happened, but there seemed to be a moment's pause; probably someone had knocked and they were waiting. A second later a loud shout rang through the street and I saw a group of figures crowding round the door and pushing a way into my poor bank.

"The gods preserve Jones!" I whispered. "I hope the old fool won't try to stop them."

As I spoke, I heard a short, sharp order from behind, "Now! Charge!"

As the word was given another body of fifty or more rushed by us full tilt, and at their head we saw the President, sword in hand, running like a young man and beckoning his men on. Up the street they swept. Involuntarily we waited a mo-



## A MAN OF MARK

ment to watch them. Just as they came near the bank they sent up a shout :

“The President! the President! Death to traitors !”

Then there was a volley, and they closed round the building.

“Now for our turn, Christina,” said I.

She grasped my arm tightly, and we sped across the road and into the wood. It seemed darker than when I came through before, or perhaps my eyes were dazzled by the glare of the street lamps. But still we got along pretty well, I helping my companion with all my power.

“Can we do it ?” she gasped.

“Please God,” said I; “a clear quarter of an hour will do it, and they ought to take that to finish off the colonel.” For I had little doubt of the issue of that *mêlée*.

On we sped, and already we could see the twinkle of the waves through the thinning trees. Five hundred yards more, and there lay life and liberty and love !

Well, of course, I might have known. Everything had gone so smoothly up to now, that any student of the laws of chance could have foretold that fortune was only delaying the inevitable slap in the face. A plan that seemed wild and risky had proved in the result as effectual as the wisest scheme. By a natural principle of compensation, the simplest obstacle was to bring us to grief. “There’s many a slip,” says the proverb. Very likely ! One was enough for our business. For just as we neared the edge of the wood, just as our eyes were gladdened by the full sight of the sea across the intervening patch of bare land, the sig-



## FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND

norina gave a cry of pain and, in spite of my arm, fell heavily to the ground. In a moment I was on my knees by her side. An old root growing out of the ground! That was all! And there lay my dear girl white and still.

“What is it, sweet?” I whispered.

“My ankle!” she murmured; “O Jack, it hurts so!” and with that she fainted.

Half an hour—thirty mortal (but seemingly immortal) minutes I knelt by her side ministering to her. I bound up the poor foot, gave her brandy from my flask. I fanned her face with my handkerchief. In a few minutes she came to, but only, poor child, to sob with her bitter pain. Move she could not, and would not. Again and again she entreated me to go and leave her. At last I persuaded her to try and bear the agony of being carried in my arms the rest of the way. I raised her as gently as I could, wrung to the heart by her gallantly stifled groan, and slowly and painfully I made my way, thus burdened, to the edge of the wood. There were no sentries in sight, and with a new spasm of hope I crossed the open land and neared the little wicket gate that led to the jetty. A sharp turn came just before we reached it, and, as I rounded this with the signorina lying yet in my arms, I saw a horse and a man standing by the gate. The horse was flecked with foam and had been ridden furiously. The man was calm and cool. Of course he was! It was the President!

My hands were full with my burden, and before I could do anything, I saw the muzzle of his revolver pointed full— At me? Oh, no! At the signorina!

“If you move a step I shoot her through the



## A MAN OF MARK

heart, Martin," he said, in the quietest voice imaginable.

The signorina looked up as she heard his voice.

"Put me down, Jack! It's no use," she said; "I knew how it would be."

I did not put her down, but I stood there helpless, rooted to the ground.

"What's the matter with her?" he said.

"Fell and sprained her ankle," I replied.

"Come, Martin," said he, "it's no go, and you know it. A near thing; but you've just lost."

"Are you going to stop us?" I said.

"Of course I am," said he.

"Let me put her down, and we'll have a fair fight."

He shook his head.

"All very well for young men," he said. "At my age, if a man holds trumps he keeps them."

"How long have you been here?"

"About two minutes. When I didn't see you at the bank I thought something was up, so I galloped on to her house. No one there! So I came on here. A good shot, eh?"

The fall had done it. But for that we should have been safe.

"Well?" he said.

In the bitterness of my heart I could hardly speak. But I was not going to play either the cur or the fool, so I said:

"Your trick, sir, and therefore your lead! I must do what you tell me."

"Honor bright, Martin?"

"Yes," said I; "I give you my word. Take the revolver if you like," and I nodded my head to the pocket where it lay.



## FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND

“No,” he said, “I trust you.”

“I bar a rescue,” said I.

“There will be no rescue,” said he grimly.

“If the colonel comes——”

“The colonel won’t come,” he said. “Whose house is that?”

It was my boatman’s.

“Bring her there. Poor child, she suffers!”

We knocked up the boatman, who thus did not get his night’s rest after all. His astonishment may be imagined.

“Have you a bed?” said the President.

“Yes,” he stammered, recognising his interlocutor.

“Then carry her up, Martin; and you, send your wife to her.”

I took her up, and laid her gently on the bed. The President followed me. Then we went downstairs again into the little parlor.

“Let us have a talk,” he said; and he added to the man, “Give us some brandy, quick, and then go.”

He was obeyed, and we were left alone with the dim light of a single candle.

The President sat down and began to smoke. He offered me a cigar and I took it, but he said nothing. I was surprised at his leisurely, abstracted air. Apparently he had nothing in the world to do but sit and keep me company.

“If your Excellency,” said I, instinctively giving him his old title, “has business elsewhere you can leave me safely. I shall not break my word.”

“I know that—I know that,” he answered. “But I’d rather stay here; I want to have a talk.”

“But aren’t there some things to settle up in the town?”



## A MAN OF MARK

"The doctor's doing all that," he said. "You see, there's no danger now. There's no one left to lead them against me."

"Then the colonel is——"

"Yes," he said gravely, "he is dead. I shot him."

"In the attack?"

"Not exactly; the fighting was over. A very short affair, Martin. They never had a chance; and as soon as two or three had fallen and the rest saw me, they threw up the sponge."

"And the colonel?"

"He fought well. He killed two of my fellows; then a lot of them flung themselves on him and disarmed him."

"And you killed him in cold blood?"

The President smiled slightly.

"Six men fell in that affair—five besides the colonel. Does it strike you that you, in fact, killed the five to enable you to run away with the girl you loved?"

It hadn't struck me in that light, but it was quite irrelevant.

"But for your scheme I should have come back without a blow," he continued; "but then I should have shot McGregor just the same."

"Because he led the revolt?"

"Because," said the President, "he has been a traitor from the beginning even to the end—because he tried to rob me of all I held dear in the world. If you like," he added, with a shrug, "because he stood between me and my will. So I went up to him and told him his hour was come, and I shot him through the head. He died like a man, Martin; I will say that."



## FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND

I could not pretend to regret the dead man. Indeed, I had been near doing the same deed myself. But I shrank before this calm ruthlessness.

Another long pause followed. Then the President said :

“ I am sorry for all this, Martin—sorry you and I came to blows.”

“ You played me false about the money,” I said bitterly.

“ Yes, yes,” he answered gently; “ I don’t blame you. You were bound to me by no ties. Of course you saw my plan ? ”

“ I supposed your Excellency meant to keep the money and throw me over.”

“ Not altogether,” he said. “ Of course I was bound to have the money. But it was the other thing, you know. As far as the money went I would have taken care you came to no harm.”

“ What was it, then ? ”

“ I thought you understood all along,” he said, with some surprise. “ I saw you were my rival with Christina, and my game was to drive you out of the country by making the place too hot for you.”

“ She told me you didn’t suspect about me and her till quite the end.”

“ Did she ? ” he answered, with a smile. “ I must be getting clever to deceive two such wide-awake, young people. Of course I saw it all along. But you had more grit than I thought. I’ve never been so nearly done by any man as by you.”

“ But for luck you would have been,” said I.

“ Yes, but I count luck as one of my resources,” he replied.

“ Well, what are you going to do now ? ”

He took no notice, but went on.



## A MAN OF MARK

“You played too high. It was all or nothing with you, just as it is with me. But for that we could have stood together. I’m sorry, Martin; I like you, you know.”

For the life of me I had never been able to help liking him.

“But likings mustn’t interfere with duty,” he went on, smiling. “What claim have you at my hands?”

“Decent burial, I suppose,” I answered.

He got up and paced the room for a moment or two. I waited with some anxiety, for life is worth something to a young man, even when things look blackest, and I never was a hero.

“I make you this offer,” he said at last. “Your boat lies there, ready. Get into her and go, otherwise——”

“I see,” said I. “And you will marry her?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Against her will?”

He looked at me with something like pity.

“Who can tell what a woman’s will will be in a week? In less than that she will marry me cheerfully. I hope you may grieve as short a time as she will.”

In my inmost heart I knew it was true. I had staked everything, not for a woman’s love, but for the whim of a girl! For a moment it was too hard for me, and I bowed my head on the table by me and hid my face.

Then he came and put his hand on mine, and said:

“Yes, Martin; young and old, we are all alike. They’re not worth quarrelling for. But Nature’s too strong.”



## FAREWELL TO AUREATALAND

"May I see her before I go?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Alone?"

"Yes," he said once more. "Go now—if she can see you."

I went up and cautiously opened the door. The signorina was lying on the bed, with a shawl over her. She seemed to be asleep. I bent over her and kissed her. She opened her eyes, and said, in a weary voice:

"Is it you, Jack?"

"Yes, my darling," said I. "I am going. I must go or die; and whether I go or die, I must be alone."

She was strangely quiet—even apathetic. As I knelt down by her she raised herself, and took my face between her hands and kissed me—not passionately, but tenderly.

"My poor Jack!" she said; "it was no use, dear. It is no use to fight against him."

Here was her strange subjection to that influence again.

"You love me?" I cried, in my pain.

"Yes," she said, "but I am very tired; and he will be good to me."

Without another word I went from her, with the bitter knowledge that my great grief found but a pale reflection in her heart.

"I am ready to go," I said to the President.

"Come, then," he replied. "Here, take these, you may want them," and he thrust a bundle of notes into my hand (some of my own from the bank I afterward discovered).

Arrived at the boat, I got in mechanically and made all preparations for the start.



## A MAN OF MARK

Then the President took my hand.

“Good-bye, Jack Martin, and good luck. Some day we may meet again. Just now there’s no room for us both here. You bear no malice?”

“No, sir,” said I. “A fair fight, and you’ve won.”

As I was pushing off, he added :

“When you arrive, send me word.”

I nodded silently.

“Good-bye, and good luck,” he said again.

I turned the boat’s head out to sea, and went forth on my lonely way into the night.



## CHAPTER XV

### A DIPLOMATIC ARRANGEMENT

As far as I am concerned, this story has now reached an end. With my departure from Aureataland, I re-entered the world of humdrum life, and since that memorable night in 1884, nothing has befallen me worthy of a polite reader's attention. I have endured the drudgery incident to earning a living; I have enjoyed the relaxations every wise man makes for himself. But I should be guilty of unpardonable egotism if I supposed that I myself was the only, or the most, interesting subject presented in the foregoing pages, and I feel I shall merely be doing my duty in briefly recording the facts in my possession concerning the other persons who have figured in this record and the country where its scene was laid.

I did not, of course, return to England on leaving Aureataland. I had no desire to explain in person to the directors all the facts with which they will now be in a position to acquaint themselves. I was conscious that, at the last at all events, I had rather subordinated their interests to my own necessities, and I knew well that my conduct would not meet with the indulgent judgment that it perhaps requires. After all, men who have lost three hundred thousand dollars can hardly be expected to be impartial, and I saw no reason for submitting myself to a biased tribunal. I preferred to seek my fortune in a fresh country (and, I may add, under



## A MAN OF MARK

a fresh name), and I am happy to say that my prosperity in the land of my adoption has gone far to justify the President's favourable estimate of my financial abilities. My sudden disappearance excited some remark, and people were even found to insinuate that the dollars went the same way as I did. I have never troubled myself to contradict these scandalous rumours, being content to rely on the handsome vindication from this charge which the President published. In addressing the House of Assembly shortly after his resumption of power, he referred at length to the circumstances attendant on the late revolution, and remarked that although he was unable to acquit Mr. Martin of most unjustifiable intrigues with the rebels, yet he was in a position to assure them, as he had already assured those to whom Mr. Martin was primarily responsible, that that gentleman's hasty flight was dictated solely by a consciousness of political guilt, and that, in money matters, Mr. Martin's hands were as clean as his own. The reproach that had fallen on the fair fame of Aureataland in this matter was due not to that able but misguided young man, but to those unprincipled persons who, in the pursuit of their designs, had not hesitated to plunder and despoil friendly traders, established in the country under the sanction of public faith.

The reproach to which his Excellency eloquently referred consisted in the fact that not a cent of those three hundred thousand dollars which lay in the bank that night was ever seen again! The theory was that the colonel had made away with them, and the President took great pains to prove that under the law of nations the restored Government could not be held responsible for this occur-



## A DIPLOMATIC ARRANGEMENT

rence. I know as little about the law of nations as the President himself, but I felt quite sure that whatever that exalted code might say (and it generally seems to justify the conduct of all parties alike), none of that money would ever find its way back to the directors' pockets. In this matter I must say his Excellency behaved to me with scrupulous consideration; not a word passed his lips about the second loan, about that unlucky cable, or any other dealings with the money. For all he said, my account of the matter, posted to the directors immediately after my departure, stood unimpeached. The directors, however, took a view opposed to his Excellency's, and relations became so strained that they were contemplating the withdrawal of their business from Whittingham altogether, when events occurred which modified their action. Before I lay down my pen I must give some account of these matters, and I cannot do so better than by inserting a letter which I had the honour to receive from his Excellency, some two years after I last saw him. I had obeyed his wish in communicating my address to him, but up to this time had received only a short but friendly note, acquainting me with the fact of his marriage to the signorina, and expressing good wishes for my welfare in my new sphere of action. The matters to which the President refers became to some extent public property soon afterward, but certain other terms of the arrangement are now given to the world for the first time.

The letter ran as follows :

“MY DEAR MARTIN: As an old inhabitant of Aureataland you will be interested in the news I



## A MAN OF MARK

have to tell you. I also take pleasure in hoping that in spite of bygone differences, your friendly feelings toward myself will make you glad to hear news of my fortunes.

“You are no doubt acquainted generally with the course of events here since you left us. As regards private friends, I have not indeed much to tell you. You will not be surprised to learn that Johnny Carr (who always speaks of you with the utmost regard) has done the most sensible thing he ever did in his life in making Donna Antonia his wife. She is a thoroughly good girl, although she seems to have a very foolish prejudice against Christina. I was able to assist the young people’s plans by the gift of the late Colonel McGregor’s estates, which under our law passed to the head of the state on that gentleman’s execution for high treason. You will be amused to hear of another marriage in our circle. The doctor and Mme. Devarges have made a match of it, and society rejoices to think it has now heard the last of the late monsieur and his patriotic sufferings. Jones, I suppose you know, left us about a year ago. The poor old fellow never recovered from his fright on that night, to say nothing of the cold he caught in your draughty coal-cellar, where he took refuge. The bank relieved him in response to his urgent petitions, and they’ve sent us out a young Puritan, to whom it would be quite in vain to apply for a timely little loan.

“I wish I could give you as satisfactory an account of public affairs. You were more or less behind the scenes over here, so you know that to keep the machine going is by no means an easy task. I have kept it going, single-handed, for fifteen years, and though it’s the custom to call me a mere ad-



## A DIPLOMATIC ARRANGEMENT

venturer (and I don't say that's wrong), upon my word I think I've given them a pretty decent Government. But I've had enough of it by now. The fact is, my dear Martin, I'm not so young as I was. In years I'm not much past middle age, but I've had the devil of a life of it, and I shouldn't be surprised if old Marcus Whittingham's lease was pretty nearly up. At any rate, my only chance, so Anderson tells me, is to get rest, and I'm going to give myself that chance. I had thought at first of trying to find a successor (as I have been denied an heir of my body), and I thought of you. But, while I was considering this, I received a confidential proposal from the Government of — [here the President named the state of which Aureataland had formed part]. They were very anxious to get back their province; at the same time, they were not at all anxious to try conclusions with me again. In short, they offered, if Aureataland would come back, a guarantee of local autonomy and full freedom; they would take on themselves the burden of the debt, and last, but not least, they would offer the present President of the Republic a compensation of five hundred thousand dollars.

“I have not yet finally accepted the offer, but I am going to do so—obtaining, as a matter of form, the sanction of the Assembly. I have made them double their offer to me, but in the public documents the money is to stand at the original figure. This recognition of my services, together with my little savings (restored, my dear Martin, to the wash-stand), will make me pretty comfortable in my old age, and leave a competence for my widow. Aureataland has had a run alone; if there had been any grit in the people they would have made a



## A MAN OF MARK

nation of themselves. There isn't any, and I'm not going to slave myself for them any longer. No doubt they'll be very well treated, and to tell the truth, I don't much care if they aren't. After all, they're a mongrel lot.

"I know you'll be pleased to hear of this arrangement, as it gives your old masters a better chance of getting their money, for, between ourselves, they'd never have got it out of me. At the risk of shocking your feelings, I must confess that your revolution only postponed the day of repudiation.

"I hoped to have asked you some day to rejoin us here. As matters stand, I am more likely to come and find you; for, when released, Christina and I are going to bend our steps to the States. And we hope to come soon. There's a little difficulty outstanding about the terms on which the Golden House and my other property are to pass to the new Government; this I hope to compromise by abating half my claim in private, and giving it all up in public. Also, I have had to bargain for the recognition of Johnny Carr's rights to the colonel's goods. When all this is settled there will be nothing to keep me, and I shall leave here without much reluctance. The first man I shall come and see is you, and we'll have some frolics together, if my old carcass holds out. But the truth is, my boy, I'm not the man I was. I've put too much steam on all my life, and I must pull up now, or the boiler will burst.

"Christina sends her love. She is as anxious to see you as I am. But you must wait till I am dead to make love to her. Ever your sincere friend,

"MARCUS W. WHITTINGHAM."



## A DIPLOMATIC ARRANGEMENT

As I write, I hear that the arrangement is to be carried out. So ends Aureataland's brief history as a nation; so ends the story of her national debt, more happily than I ever thought it would. I confess to a tender recollection of the sunny, cheerful, lazy, dishonest little place, where I spent four such eventful years. Perhaps I love it because my romance was played there, as I should love any place where I had seen the signorina. For I am not cured. I don't go about moaning—I enjoy life. But, in spite of my affection for the President, hardly a day passes that I don't curse that accursed tree-root.

And she? what does she feel?

I don't know. I don't think I ever did know. But I have had a note from her, and this is what she says:

“Fancy seeing old Jack again—poor forsaken Jack! Marcus is very kind (but very ill, poor fellow); but I shall like to see you, Jack. Do you remember what I was like? I'm still rather pretty. This is in confidence, Jack. Marcus thinks you'll run away from us, now we are coming to ——town [that's where I live]. But I don't think you will.

“Please meet me at the depot, Jack, 12.15 train. Marcus is coming by a later one, so I shall be desolate if you don't come. And bring that white rose with you. Unless you produce it, I won't speak to you.  
CHRISTINA.”

Well, with another man's wife, this is rather embarrassing. But a business man can't leave the place where his business is because a foolish girl insists on coming there.



## A MAN OF MARK

And as I am here, I may as well be civil and go to meet her. And, oh, well! as I happen to have the thing, I may as well take it with me. It can't do any harm.

THE END.























OCT 3 1903

1 COPY DEL. TO CAT. DIV.  
OCT. 3 1903

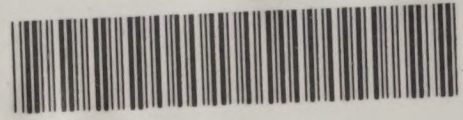
OCT 12 1903







LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022149957

